

Some Actors
in
Our Lord's Passion



By HERMANN LILIENTHAL



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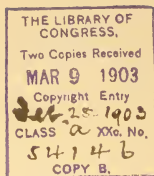
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Some Actors in Our Lord's Passion

By *Sonsdale*
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Author of "Lent—Past and Present"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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Bishop of Rhode Island and Presiding Bishop

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To My Wife,
 My Companion in Thought,
 My Helpmeet in Life,
 I Inscribe
 This Book.

Introduction

THERE are many people who, when they read anything which seems to them particularly heavy and wearisome, are apt to say, "It is as dull as a sermon"; but if all discourses were like those contained in this book, one would be more likely to say of what pleased them, "It is as *interesting* as a sermon."

The writer *paints* with his pen, and the lights and shadows are so adjusted, that the figures stand before us with wondrous vividness, while the men he describes are prominent actors in the most solemn and eventful transaction which ever took place on earth.

The first subject fills us with horror and we wonder how it was possible for Judas to have found entrance into the household of Jesus and, for so long a time, to have remained there, but

the careful and discriminating analysis of his character helps us to solve the mystery.

The history of Peter also is told in such a way as to make clear the inconsistencies of his conduct—while that of Pontius Pilate is so searching and thorough as to destroy any doubts as to his real desire and intentions and to justify the perpetual recalling of his name in our Creed—since he was chief among the murderers of our Lord.

The sketches of Herod and Barabbas are drawn with wonderful fidelity and in a manner which impresses our minds with the terrible wickedness of the men who controlled the events of this period, and the horrible degradation of the people who chose that the robber Barabbas should be pardoned and the Holy Jesus crucified.

I wish that these discourses might be read in every parish during Lent, for they have touched me more deeply than any sermons which I have ever read, and since I am in my ninety-first year this is saying a great deal.

They must appeal to the young as well as to

the mature mind—because of their simplicity and the dramatic interest with which every subject is surrounded: and will be listened to by a class of people who are not ordinarily moved by appeals from the pulpit.

I wish that the book might not only fall into the hands of every intelligent layman for private perusal, but be placed on the study table of all the clergymen of the Church, since no one can fail to be impressed, in heart and conscience with the truths embodied here, or not be impelled with a great desire to convey to others the solemn lessons contained in these discourses.

The sermons for Good Friday and Easter must especially bring us very near to Christ and fill us with a profound sense of the terrible emergency which brought Him down to earth and nailed Him to the Cross on Calvary.

THOMAS M. CLARK.

*Bishops House,
Providence, R. I.,
December 5th, 1902.*

Preface

“**S**OME Actors in Our Lord’s Passion” is a course of Sermons preached in Lent, 1902, in Christ Church, Hartford, Conn. To complete the theme there are added two sermons—one for Good-Friday, and one for Easter-day—preached in connection with the same course. At the request of friends these sermons are now given a wider circulation.

It is to be noted that these are sermons, not essays, preached, not read, hence the retention of the direct address.

The author, finally, desires to return his sincere thanks to the venerable and revered Bishop of Rhode Island, and Presiding Bishop of the Church, who admitted the author a candidate for orders, and advanced him to the Priesthood, and now has kindly written a word of introduction for these sermons preached from the pulpit of

the parish of which the Bishop was himself sometime rector, thus strengthening the former bond of association, both with the parish and the author.

H. L.

*Hartford, Conn.,
December, 1902.*

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I

JUDAS

Some Actors in Our Lord's Passion

I

Judas

The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas which betrayed Him answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, thou hast said.—*Matthew xxvii: 24, 25.*

THE destiny of the human race is centred in the agony of Gethsemane, and the tragedy of Calvary. And of the actors in that awful drama few present a more weird and tragic character than Judas the betrayer of his Master.

We are apt to think of Judas as some monster incarnate, to be spoken of with bated breath, as

if he were outside the pale of humanity, and not to be reckoned in the category of ordinary mortals. And yet he was a babe as we all have been; he once was fondled by a tender mother. He had looked up into her face with innocent love. He had grown up in childish guilelessness, mingling with other boys, enjoying their games, their interests, their studies, their joys. No mark of Cain was branded on that innocent forehead then. He grew up, we may infer from his after history, an active, promising, enthusiastic and shrewd young man.

Then one day across the path of the young man comes the Rabbi of Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth. Crowds were following Him, attracted by His miracles, and His teaching. He—Judas—will join the throng, he too will see whether he may not have a share in the glories of the coming kingdom of which he heard so much. If he is to gain any position in the new kingdom, it will not do to hang on the outer fringe of the multitude, he must become more closely attached to this new prophet reputed to be the

Son of David, the promised Messiah. Already this prophet is selecting His special followers and disciples—those who are to be His intimate companions—he, Judas, must therefore belong to this inner circle. He will attract the teacher of Nazareth by displaying his eagerness to be enrolled; he will offer his services, his allegiance. A doubtful tradition tells us that Judas is the disciple who offered his services to Jesus, saying, “Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,” and as if to deter him Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.” As a matter of fact, however, we know that Judas Iscariot, *i. e.*, the man of Kerioth, was enrolled among the Twelve, that inner body of disciples who followed their Master everywhere. In this connection it is interesting to note that Judas is the only one of the Twelve who is not a Galilean, but that he comes from Judæa.

As the history of this little band proceeds, we find that Judas becomes their treasurer, he bears

the bag. Doubtless he had shown some financial efficiency. His southern training may have made him more prudent. Perhaps he could make the money go farther, and last longer. Perhaps he was not so generous to the needy as any other of the disciples would be; anyhow, he must have shown some qualifications for the office, and so is honored with the trust. He was what the world might call wise, prudent, judicious, economical.

At first everything goes well. Crowds flock to the teacher of Nazareth. It is quite possible that the hopes which urged Judas to join the Galilean band will be fulfilled. Miracles are wrought which show that his Master possesses a power greater than any heretofore possessed of man. The enthusiasm of the people increases, so that after the feeding of the Five Thousand, the people would take Jesus by force and make Him a king. This is a crucial point in Christ's career. Now can be fulfilled His claims of Messiahship—now He can rule on the throne of David His father. The tide of popularity is at

its height. Let Him float Himself upon it while it is turning His way. But strange—passing strange—so far from yielding to the popular desire and wish, Jesus withdraws Himself. He refuses to be made a king. What can it mean? The people are amazed, dumbfounded. Can it be that after all this Galilean prophet is an impostor, is no Messiah, is no Son of David, is not the promised king? Jesus shrinks now from popular attempts to advance Him, retires more and more from public notice; and soon the tide which had been running His way turns. He is doubted by the people, the crowds leave Him, some of His disciples turn back from following Him; while His enemies, the Pharisees, the chief priests, and rulers become bolder. Now they begin to plot against His life.

All this change, this rising to and waning from popularity takes place before the eyes of Judas. He had come to join what he thought a successful political and national movement, by which he was to be advanced to station and power. He had cast all he had into this cause;

his means, his calling, his hopes of advancement, his life. Were his hopes, then, all a delusion? Was he to be disappointed? Was there to be no earthly kingdom after all? He listens to his Master's teaching; he watches His actions. Alas! what a disenchantment. He begins to see that the kingdom of heaven is quite different from what he had expected. He has been misled, deceived. But he will at least try to get something out of his connection. Out of the wreck of fortune he will save something.

Notice how this thought, this feeling begins to work. He kept the bag. Here at least is one opportunity. None know what they have. And now Judas begins to steal. We are told plainly, he is a thief.

But matters grow worse. Instead of regaining lost ground his Master seems to be losing. The people—the mob so easily turned and moved, worked upon and used as an instrument—is now turning in the direction of the rulers; why should not he? His disillusionment and disappointment are complete. His stealing has be-

gun his downward course. Deterioration of character sets in rapidly. His Master had in many ways, at many times by words and acts, by parables, by allusions, tried to win back this disciple so fast losing his loyalty; even at the last when it seemed hopeless to do anything more, yet the Lord in that upper chamber stooped to wash the feet of him who was only too soon to betray Him. But all to no effect. Satan had entered into the heart of Judas. He was now hopelessly committed to the enemies of his Master. He could not and would not accept any endeavor to recall him to allegiance. Alas! Up from that table where were broken the sacred symbols, he rises to complete his perfidy, and hastens to arrange the betrayal of his Master,—and all for the paltry pittance of thirty pieces of silver, for less than \$20.

Then comes the awful scene of the Garden of Gethsemane: when this one, chosen from a number, this one of the Twelve comes with officers and a band, and betrays his Master with a kiss. Oh to think that the token of closest

love and affection should be used for the purpose of the basest and most shameful treachery and betrayal.

But the end is not yet. The trial of Jesus soon convinces Judas that he has perpetrated a most perfidious crime. Now comes the awakening, the awakening to the horror of his deed. Is it too late now for retrieval? Can he undo his crime? What now shall he—Judas—do? Might he seek Him whom he had betrayed? Might he not cast himself at the feet of Jesus and even after his infamous treachery be forgiven? He might. But despair, remorse hinder him, crush him. Hope has withered in his soul. "The road, the streets, the people's faces, all seemed now to bear witness against him, and for Jesus. He read it everywhere. He felt it always; he imagined it till his whole being was in flame. What had been, what was, what would be! Heaven and earth receded from him; there were voices in the air, and pangs in the soul—and no escape, help, counsel, or hope anywhere." Oh, so terrible is remorse and despair.

Now began the dread lash of conscience so long lulled to sleep. Judas was still a human being, he still had a conscience working in him. This he had not bargained for when he bargained for the money. And now that he had betrayed his Lord, to use the words of Ederseim "that night in Gethsemane would never more pass from his soul. In the thickening and encircling gloom all around, he must have ever seen only the torchlight glare as it fell on the pallid face of the Divine Sufferer. In the terrible stillness of the storm he must have ever heard only these words—'Judas! betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' He did not hate Jesus then—he hated nothing, he hated everything. He was utterly desolate as the storm of despair swept over his disenchanted soul, and swept him before it. No one in heaven or on earth to appeal to; no one—angel or man, to stand by him! He must get rid of those thirty pieces of silver, which like thirty serpents coiled around his soul with terrible hissing of death. Then at least his deed would have nothing of

the selfish¹ in it; only a terrible error, a mistake to which he had been incited by these Sanhedrists. Back to them with the money, and let them have it again!

“ And so forward he pressed amid the wondering crowd, which would give way before that haggard face with the wild eyes that crime had made old in those few hours, till he came upon that knot of priests and Sanhedrists, perhaps at that very moment speaking of it all. Not even the priests who had paid him the price of blood would have aught of him, as with hoarse cry he sobbed—‘ I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood!’ They turned from him with impatience, and in contempt reply, ‘ What is that to us, see thou to it!’ Thus they sent him reeling back into his darkness. For a moment he stared wildly before him, the very thirty pieces of silver still clutched in his hand. For a moment only, and then he wildly rushed forward towards the sanctuary itself, he bent forward, and with all his might hurled from him those thirty pieces of silver, so that each resounded as

it fell on the marble pavement. Then out he rushed from the Temple, out of Jerusalem into solitude! Whither shall it be? Down into the horrible solitude of the valley of Hinnom, the Tophet of old, with its ghastly memories, with its ghostly associations. But it was not solitude, for it seemed now peopled with figures, faces, sounds. Across the valley, and up the steep sides of the mountain! Here jagged rocks rise perpendicularly; perhaps there was some gnarled, bent, stunted tree. Up there he climbed to the top of that rock. Now slowly and deliberately he unwound the long girdle that held his garment. It was the girdle in which he had carried those thirty pieces of silver. He was now quite calm and collected. With that girdle he will hang himself on that tree close by, and when he has fastened it, he will throw himself off from that jagged rock. It is done. . . . And now he is going deeper, farther out into the night—to its farthest bounds, where rises and falls the dark flood of death. The wild howl of the storm has lashed the dark waters into fury;

they toss and break in wild billows at his feet. One narrow rift in the cloud-curtain overhead, and in the pale deathlike light lies the figure of the Christ, so calm, so placid, untouched and unharmed on the storm-tossed waters, as it had been that night lying on the lake of Galilee when Judas had seen Him come to them over the surging billows, and then bid them be at peace. Peace! What peace to him now—in earth or heaven? It was the same Christ, but thorn-crowned, with nail-prints in His hands and feet. And this Judas had done to the Master! Only for one moment did it seem to lie there; then it was sucked up by the dark waters beneath. Again the cloud-curtain is drawn up; the darkness is thicker, and the storm wilder than before. Out into that darkness, with one wild plunge—there, where the figure of the dead Christ had lain on the waters! And the dark waters have closed around him in eternal silence.” Judas—the thief, the traitor, the suicide, the deicide.

What an end to what a career! Unparalleled

in the history of man, impossible, we think, of repetition. Is this so? May there be no repetition? What then mean those words of scripture in which the sacred writer warns us of those who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame"?

We think then of Judas as a monster of iniquity, who committed a deed that can never be repeated. Is this true? Are we so sure?

Consider the character of Judas, and see whether after all it is so different from what it is possible for any of us to become or to be. There was nothing to distinguish Judas from the rest of the disciples until the last deadly act of betrayal was accomplished. Before that he was to all appearances the same as his companions. In fact from his position as the almoner and treasurer of the little band, we might infer that in the eyes of the world he was a little superior to the rest of his associates. Doubtless Judas had a reputation as a financier, a reputation no doubt of value in the first as in the twentieth century. He was not easily moved to generous feeling by

any act of supreme devotion. When Mary of Bethany anointed the Saviour with that precious ointment costing about three hundred pence, Judas exclaims against this waste. He was indignant at this seemingly useless extravagance. No. To all outward appearances if you and I had met Judas before the betrayal, while he still possessed the confidence of his associates, we might have esteemed him higher than some of his companions. He might have seemed to us less boorish, more businesslike, more a man of the world than the Galilean fishermen. If we had to make a choice from that band of disciples for some important position of trust, in which ability, sagacity, prudence, wisdom were required, we might have chosen him in preference to any of his fellow-disciples.

Then, too, we may be sure that at first there must have been some germ of good in him, otherwise he would not have been willing to follow this new and unknown teacher of Nazareth. To be sure there was mixed up in this attachment and following some idea of self-advanc-

ment and political preferment. But did not the other eleven also expect this? Did they not all of them frequently dispute as to who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Had not the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, solicited the highest station of honor for her sons? Wherein was Judas more ambitious than the others? If we regard Judas at his first following of Jesus he was not abnormal in character at all. He does not seem to have been different from the eleven. We are too much in the habit of judging his character not at the beginning of his career, but at its end: not as he was when first he joined the Galilean prophet, but as the base traitor and betrayer of his Master and Friend. And so we think him a monster of iniquity, an incarnate demon. In fact we are apt to consider all the apostles as somehow different from ourselves, and when they deny their Lord or betray Him we consider the crime enormous. We say to ourselves, "Had we been in their place we never would have been guilty as were Peter and Judas; we would not have betrayed,

deserted, denied our Master in the hour of His loneliness and need."

But crimes are committed only after deterioration of character, and deterioration is so gradual, often so unobserved, or if observed we excuse or justify our word or conduct, and before we know it, we are doing what we would have shuddered at, if any one had told us we should one day do it. Do you suppose if Judas had been told when first he joined Jesus of Nazareth that he would one day basely betray Him, that he would have believed it? Nay. He would have repudiated the thought, he would have spurned the suggestion, he would have resented it as an insult.

The treachery of betrayal is a most damning sin, and yet do you think that those who in history stand out as the great traitors, whether to country or friend, do you think they originally believed betrayal on their part possible? Ask Themistocles at Salamis when he saved Greece from the Persian King Xerxes, whether it was possible he would ever betray his country to Persia?

Would he not have resented the imputation with indignation, and yet did not Themistocles eventually betray his country? Ask Benedict Arnold at Quebec or Saratoga, where he fought so valiantly for these colonies struggling for independence against the British crown, when his patriotism and loyalty were unquestioned and untainted, whether he would ever betray his country, and yet he stands to-day impeached before the world as one of the most infamous of traitors. Were either of these men so abnormal in character at first? If they had any distinguishing trait was it not the possession of uncommon and extraordinary ability?

Brethren, there is nothing strange and nothing impossible in this world, and the conduct and career of Judas are practically repeated to-day by many and by all who have betrayed their Christian faith; who having put their hand to the plough have turned back; who dazzled by worldly advantages have given up the service of Christ; who because the world so persistently shouts that Christianity is a failure are discour-

aged and turn back from following Christ ; who as disciples of the Crucified would be " Christians without the cross."

Knowing what you do of life, and looking it may be into your own experience, brethren, dare you say the infamous deed of Judas is unparalleled, that it can never be repeated ; or is it not true that his tragic deed and life find their counterpart in many a Christian life to-day ; that the betrayer in all his enormity stands revealed as a witness not only of what we can become, but of what we may become ? His history lives to warn us how discipleship is no safeguard against betrayal, how intimate communion does not debar disloyalty, how even tender affection is not proof against blackest treachery. How terrible the possibility, how tragic the probability !

Ah ! Brethren, as we read or hear read the words of the suffering Saviour who with bleeding heart, and aching voice comes into our life saying with bitterness of soul, " Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me," let us re-

member Judas and his awful and guilty career, then let us ask with serious and sad solemnity, and with deep searching of heart, "Lord, is it I?"

II

PETER

II

Peter

And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly.—*Luke* xxii : 61, 62.

WHEN we meditate upon the Passion of our Lord—the intensity of His agony, and the bitterness of the cross—we must surely realize that its anguish was deepened by the betrayal of one disciple, and the denial of another, that in the supreme moment of trial, Jesus was abandoned by His chosen disciples whom for three years he had been training by most intimate communion and private intercourse. How bitter, yea heartrending must it have been to have the great betrayal followed by the great denial. Judas betrays his Master with a kiss, and Peter denies Him with an oath. Can

failure be more complete? Can discipleship be more ignominious?

Yet Peter was sure he would not deny his Lord. We remember how again and again when told by the Saviour that he would deny Him, Peter replies with vehemence that though he should die with his Master, yet would he never deny Him. And he meant it. His zeal and attachment in the past led Peter to believe he could and would do as he said. All his feelings had been aroused by the thought that one of them should betray his Lord. What a dastardly deed! How base and treacherous! Need we be surprised that the bare thought of such treachery aroused indignation in the apostle's breast, that it stirred up the heroic in his nature, kindled his zeal and courage, and urged him to give voice to his emotion, "though I should die with Thee, yet will I never deny Thee."

Impulsive, warm hearted, forward, and enthusiastic Peter gave little thought before he spoke. He seldom measured his speech, or gauged his

own capacity, but from the fulness of his heart he gave utterance to his feelings. Peter was intensely human. We can imagine how he must have hated baseness and treachery, how his whole soul must have revolted against the thought that any one of the twelve could be disloyal to his Master. In character Peter was practical rather than contemplative, eager for action, and disinclined to meditation. His energy was restive to find vent in expression. He was quick in decision, and also in execution, but his judgment was not always right. "He was easily misled by a rash self-confidence to say more and to venture more than he could accomplish, and though he quickly and ardently seized on an object, he allowed himself too easily to relinquish it, by yielding to the force of another impression." This impulsiveness was manifested when, seeing the Saviour walking on the water, he asked if he might not do the same, and when bidden to come, and the waves began to rise, his fear overcame him, and he cried "Save, Lord, I perish!" So again in that upper

room at the last supper, when the Master in wondrous humility girded Himself with a towel and took a basin and water to wash His disciples' feet, it is Peter who says "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? . . . Thou shalt never wash my feet." But notice how quickly he recedes from this attitude when told, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Then Peter saith, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." As eager now for washing, as before in refusing.

In this impulsiveness we see a tendency to rash boldness which when trial or temptation comes, shrinks and fails. When excess of feeling has been manifested without commensurate inward strength, then it is that the unexpected happens. Peter was certainly sincere in his strong asseverations of attachment. He honestly believed his own words when he professed that he was willing to die with his Master. But a crisis is often a revelation of weakness as well as of strength. It reveals at times phases of character that were never suspected. Misfortune

and danger often disclose tendencies and defects that never showed themselves when one was happy and prosperous. Such instances must have come into your experience. Some of your friends and acquaintances must have by their conduct in critical situations surprised you, have perhaps utterly disappointed or deceived you, as well as at times confirmed your confidence in them.

“Though I should die with Thee, yet will I never deny Thee.” These are brave words, how are they justified? Follow Peter into the courtyard of the high priest’s palace. See him as he stands there warming himself by the fire of coals. He seems to be a stranger, and so one of the maids with critical eye examines him, and as she gazes suddenly she exclaims, “And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.” And what replies Peter? He denied saying, “I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.” Meanwhile his Master is but a short distance away falsely accused, powerless in the hands of His malignant enemies,—that Master for whom he had professed attachment unto death. Uneasy

man that he is because of his cowardice Peter moves out into the porch where he is less likely to be questioned, "and the cock crew." Ominous sound, does it not call to mind the Saviour's words: "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice." Alas! Retreat seems impossible. For "a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by—this is one of them, and he denied it again." And still his Master was on His trial, and already the insults to His person had begun. And a little after, *i. e.*, about an hour after, while Peter anxious to go, yet as a victim fascinated and fastened, moved about uneasy, and restless, "they that stood by said again to Peter, surely thou art one of them, for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear saying I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew." Oh, what a base and dastardly denial. The shrill crow had scarcely ceased when Peter remembered the words "before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice." Yet only a

few hours before he had declared his willingness to die with his Lord. How shamefully had he failed; how wretchedly his boasted courage had vanished. Could he but get away, away from this scene of denial and blasphemy. And just at this moment while yet the oath had scarcely died from his lips, the oath uttered with such vehemence that probably it reached even to his Master's ears, the recreant disciple looked up, and as he looked up "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter"; yes, just at that moment in the midst of his own trial, of his shameful and brutal treatment, the Lord turned round and looked upon him—yes in all that assembly—upon Peter—"a glance full we must believe of tenderest pity, and deepest sadness as of one who was moved not by anger but by sorrow." "His eyes spake His words, nay much more, they searched down to the innermost depths of Peter's heart, and broke them open. They had pierced through all self-delusion, false shame, and fear; they had reached the man, the disciple, the lover of Jesus. Forth they burst, the waters of

conviction, of true shame, of heart sorrow, of the agonies of self-condemnation." Out into the night he rushed, out from that scene of denial and shameful blasphemy, out into the darkness, weeping bitterly. Could he ever forget that look, so pitiful, so reproachful, so sorrowful! That look must have burnt itself into his heart and soul, never more to be the same, never more to be free from that compassionate gaze.

"The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word—
No gesture of reproach! The heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
Their thunders that way. The forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was; none guess; for those who have
seen

Wronged lovers loving through a death pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call,
And Peter from the height of blasphemy—
'I never knew this man' did quail and fall,
As knowing straight THAT GOD,—and turned free
And went out speechless from the face of all,
And filled the silence weeping bitterly.

"I think that look of Christ might seem to say—
'Thou Peter! art thou then a common stone
Which I at last must break My heart upon,
For all God's charge to His high angels may

Guard My foot better? Did I yesterday
Wash *thy* feet, My beloved, that they should run
Quick to deny Me 'neath the morning sun?
And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray?
The cock crows coldly.—Go, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear!
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here.
My voice, to God and angels, shall attest,
Because I KNOW this man, let him be clear.' "

How shall we account for Peter's conduct? Had his character completely changed, or is it, that not until now have certain defects been brought to light, become prominent in being tried and tested. Character is not made or unmade by a single act, though it may reveal itself in some supreme act. How then shall we explain Peter's denial? It can only be done by showing that there were certain radically weak elements of character that now had a chance to show themselves.

First we know that Peter had always shown confidence in himself. He had displayed self-assurance, there was a certain strain of vainglory and boastfulness in his nature. But his self-reli-

ance and confidence had not taken into account a set of circumstances in which moral courage would be needed even more than physical courage. It was here that Peter failed. Moral courage was weak in him. Even in later years at Antioch he fell because of this same lack of moral courage, when having lived with Gentiles as a Gentile, he withdrew from association with them upon being charged with it by certain Jews. In the apostle's nature there was a wish to be well thought of by men. He desired popularity. When approved by general sentiment, he could display great courage and leadership, but if he was on what might be considered the unpopular, the weaker, or losing side, then his courage failed.

Closely connected with lack of moral courage is the sense of shame. Peter was now doubtless ashamed to be connected with a man who was a prisoner, whose claims were repudiated; with a cause that now seemed to be declining, despised, ridiculed. How could he acknowledge himself a disciple of that lone Man standing helpless and

friendless before the high priest and Sanhedrin,—that lonely Man already betrayed by one of His disciples, and abandoned by the others,—and now as He stood before the rulers was insulted, buffeted, and spit upon by the malicious and cruel servants. To ally ourselves with what is despised, contemptuous! No! We must by all means avoid this! Ridicule, contempt, and fear of what the world will think have overthrown more disciples of Christ than force or threats.

Then, again, Peter might have asked himself, “What good will it do me to acknowledge allegiance now? Everything points to its uselessness. All the hopes I had of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel are shattered. Jesus, my Master, He who filled me with these vain hopes—is now seized and already condemned. What can I do to help Him—I alone! Why don’t the others stand by Him? If the other ten would, then I would. But why should the test of loyalty be laid wholly upon me? I am no more responsible for allegiance than they are. If they have deserted, I have the right to deny. I can

do no good alone." Furthermore he might have said, "What right have I to be questioned or be asked? These servants, these women have no right to inquire into my affairs, my beliefs, my religious attachments. It is none of their business. I have a perfect right to refuse to tell them the truth; they are not entitled to it. Confession will not help my Master, and it will ruin me." And so in the face of the strong, and seemingly irresistible opposition; influenced also by plausible self-reasoning, he gives way, he makes up his mind he will not confess. He denies his Lord, and at last he denies Him with an oath.

Then, too, we may believe that there was also some fear for his own safety and life. We may be ever so brave, yet the instinct of self-preservation may often in a crisis, or unexpected emergency rob us of reason and honor, make us most cowardly, strip us of our courage, make us do anything to save ourselves. What will not people do in a panic, when a theatre is on fire, or when a vessel is sinking in mid ocean? Indeed we seldom know what we would do, how we

would act when we stand face to face with imminent death. Strength of attachment fails at times to rise above the stronger force of fear. It was such a crisis that confronted Peter. His life seemed to be at stake. How easy to save it with a lie and oath that could neither save nor hurt his Master. And just then the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked on Peter.

What memories it awoke, what shame it aroused. Whether true or not, there is a tradition that for nearly forty years even until Peter was himself crucified as his Lord, the remembrance of this night of denial never left the apostle, but that in penitence, "morning by morning he rose at the hour when the look of his Master entered into his soul, to pray once more for pardon."

This pardon we know was granted. The base denial was pardoned by full restoration. It was by the lake-side where Peter's untroubled life had been spent, ere yet the eventful call came, "Follow Me." Yes, it was by that lake-side, after the shameful crucifixion, after the glorious

resurrection that the Saviour appeared to seven of His disciples, among them Peter. They had been fishing all night and caught nothing, and now at daybreak a form appears on the shore, a voice is heard, and the stranger after learning of their ill-success says, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship and ye shall find." And once again as in the days of their early discipleship the net is filled to breaking. It is no stranger that has spoken, it is the Lord. When they come to land they see a fire of coals and fish laid thereon and bread. They are invited to dine. After dining—still seated by the fire of coals, a fire which for Peter could only evoke sad reminiscence, and arouse deep feelings of shame and penitence—for it was by such a fire of coals only a few weeks before that he had denied his Lord,—the Saviour, with thrice repeated question to correspond to the threefold denial asks Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou Me?" "Peter understood it all. No longer with confidence in self, and avoiding the former reference to others he replied appealing rather to his

Lord's than to his own consciousness, 'Yea! Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.' . . . Yes, Peter did love the Lord Jesus. He had loved Him when he said it only too confident in the strength of his feelings that he would follow his Master even unto death. Jesus saw it all, yea, and how the love of the ardent temperament which had once made him rove at wild liberty, would give place to patient work of love and be crowned with martyrdom." The denial of the past was forgiven, and genuine penitence was shown by a life of devotion even unto death.

If tradition may be trusted the end came at Rome during the Neronian persecution. At the urgent request of the Christians there, the apostle was prevailed upon to flee the city for his safety. At night he leaves, but ere he had reached the city gates he sees—strange sight—his Lord coming to meet him. The apostle impulsively, as of old, questions, "*Domine, quo vadis?*" Lord, whither goest Thou?" to which the Lord replies, "I go to be crucified again." The apostle rec-

ognizes the rebuke, and turns back into the city to endure the crucifixion he would escape.

And are there no Peters to-day; no denials like his? Have we none of us done as he did? Denied our Lord by being ashamed of Him; ashamed of our religion; held back from acknowledging Him; kept silent when our religion was attacked or ridiculed, and our Master put on His trial once again by the mocking of skeptics, disbelievers, revilers? Do we not at times when in certain company or places ask, what use to confess discipleship, *i. e.*, act, speak, live as a Christian? To do so will subject us to ridicule, scorn, contempt, perhaps loss of position, or of advantages, or of some prize—social or financial. To confess will not do Christ any good; it will injure us. Yes we say, “It is better not to confess, for then we shall not cause ridicule to be brought upon our religion, and our Christ.” We try to deceive ourselves that we really have the cause of Christ at heart, and perhaps in justification of our silence repeat the Saviour’s words, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs,

neither cast ye your pearls before swine." We say—"this is a time to keep silent. Do as the rest. Aye, when challenged—deny." Do you not then hear the cock crow? Oh man, oh woman, is it not the same denial as of old? Was the apostle so very dastardly after all? Do we say his conduct was unpardonable? Do we think we would not have acted as he acted? Let us cast our minds over our own lives, and notice the times we have been ashamed of our religious convictions, been ashamed to pray, to worship God, to acknowledge Him whether at home, or in some public place, and will it be only thrice that we have thus denied our Lord, or will it not be more frequently than we can count?

Happy indeed if in our denial the Lord in mercy and love turn and look upon us with His pitying and forgiving eye, and bring us back to penitence and fidelity.

Disciples of Jesus of Nazareth!—do you never hear the cock crow in your lives?

III

CAIAPHAS

III

Caiaphas

And one of them named Caiaphas being the high priest that same year said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.—*John xi: 49, 50.*

SO spake the High Priest Caiaphas,—bold, unscrupulous, clear-sighted and ambitious—in that preliminary council which planned definitely to apprehend Jesus. This council met soon after Lazarus had been raised from the dead—a notable miracle which could not be concealed, and none deny. The fame of it spread throughout all Judæa, and in consequence of it many of the Jews believed. The question the ecclesiastical rulers now found themselves confronted with was, what were they to do in regard to the claims of this teacher of Nazareth? The people would naturally look to see what attitude

their religious leaders, teachers, and rulers—the high priest, the Sanhedrin, the scribes, and elders—would take. They were versed in the law ; they understood the prophecies ; they were the natural persons to direct religious teaching, and to formulate doctrinal beliefs. To these representatives of religion the people instinctively looked for guidance. If not to them, to whom should they or could they turn ? Still more the high priest and Sanhedrin embodied what little semblance and remnant of authority the Romans had left to the Jews.

The office therefore of the high priest gathering in his person as he did both ecclesiastical and political supremacy for the nation and people was of extreme importance and of paramount influence. To interfere with this supremacy came the teaching, the works, the claims of one Jesus of Nazareth ; His teaching so wonderful that “the common people heard Him gladly,” and crowded to listen ; His teaching so imperative, “for He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes” ; His teaching so unique, “for

never man spake like this man"; His teaching so human and compassionate, "for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost"; His teaching so loving and forgiving seen in numberless instances when the heart-broken sinner departed, comforted by the words "thy sins be forgiven thee; go thy way, thy faith hath saved thee"; this teaching had compelled and drawn multitudes to follow the new teacher.

Then, too, His miracles had attracted many. It is perhaps impossible for us to realize what a religious sensation and revolution the teaching and miracles of Jesus caused. All Palestine must have been stirred to its remotest villages. Hundreds and thousands of families throughout the land must have discussed the merits and the claims of this new prophet. Not only Galilee, but Judæa and Jerusalem, must have been filled with rumors and reports of His gracious words and deeds. It is impossible for us to conceive the religious excitement and emotion—and our generation has not been without some religious sensations and claims—the strange longing and

yearning which this Galilean Rabbi aroused. What hopes and expectations must have been excited; what national ambitions might be achieved. Ah! what balm for the hungry and wounded soul and heart might He not furnish.

And, then, to crown all, think of that unparalleled triumphal entry into Jerusalem a few days before the Passover, when almost a whole city went out to meet Him as He came from Bethany to Jerusalem, when in rapture of joy and enthusiasm the multitudes cut down branches and spread them in the way, and even took off their outer garments and strewed them in the way, and with palm branches in their hands hailed Him with cries, "Hozanna to the Son of David; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hozanna in the highest." Can we realize the intense excitement this triumphal entry aroused, and wonder that the city was moved to exclaim, "Who is this?" Can we not readily credit the confession of helplessness of the Pharisees, "Perceive ye how ye prevail

nothing? Behold the world is gone after Him"? or again their appeal to Jesus to repress the triumphal cries, and His reply, "I tell you that if these should hold their peace the stones would immediately cry out."

It was evident that the relation of the high priest and elders to the people was in danger. The growing influence of Jesus with the people threatened their power; if they did not watch and counteract this influence, their authority and supremacy soon would be a thing of the past. The unquestioned power which they had exercised, and the implicit obedience which the people had rendered were both at stake. Do we wonder that they were unwilling to surrender their influence, power, authority, supremacy? Do we wonder at the jealousy, envy, yes malignant hate which would be aroused in the hearts of the ecclesiastical rulers as they noticed the unbounded and growing popularity of this young and unaccredited teacher—a teacher without family connections, without academic antecedents; a teacher who in many instances had

shown his superiority to their traditions, and had exposed with merciless sarcasms their hypocrisies; a teacher who only a few days before in righteous anger had cleansed the Temple precincts of those who sold doves, and had overthrown the tables of the money changers, yes had cleansed the Temple courts of huckstering and bartering, and yet no one at the time had dared to interfere, or been bold enough to resist. Surely this was a critical time for the ecclesiastical rulers. If the popular feeling for the Galilean prophet grew then the influence and authority of the high priest were doomed.

We can readily imagine that Caiaphas, the high priest and his family, were not going to yield without a struggle. They determined to end the career of this unauthorized teacher, this unconscious rival of theirs.

But how? Is there not a proverb that every man has his price? The high priest and rulers had not lived and intrigued as long as they had without knowing that the loyalty of many a friend, and the allegiance of many a disciple can

be tampered with. Whether Judas first came to them, or they first made overtures to Judas the plot between them was settled. The rulers had seduced for a paltry thirty pieces of silver one of the inner circle of disciples. He would arrange to betray his Master. It would be at night when there would be no danger from the people rising in his defense,—at night when his Master might best be taken unawares. How greedily these religious rulers fell in with the plan. How determined they were that, when they moved, they would move swiftly and surely, would end the pretensions of their rival, would turn the popular tide, would regain their fast waning influence and authority.

I need not recite again the tragedy of the Garden, the crime of eternity. Humanly speaking the plot succeeded perfectly. The small band of disciples—what could it do against the great company armed with swords and staves? Before this show of force the disciples fled ignominiously. Triumphantly the prisoner is led away to the high priest's palace. And

there, though one disciple had recovered sufficient courage to follow, yet when confronted with the fact of discipleship he shamefully denies his Lord. And alone before His enemies stands Jesus of Nazareth—before Caiaphas, envious, jealous, worldly,—before rulers determined upon His death.

Let us consider, then, the reasons for this determination to put Jesus to death, this fierce vehemence of Caiaphas and the rulers to justify their condemnation. The cause is found in one of the blackest and most deadly of sins—envy—a sin so easily nursed, so silent, so unseen, and yet so malicious and malignant that it seems to spring from the deepest depths of the heart of Satan himself,—a sin that like a hot blasting storm wastes the heart, and dries up all affection, all pity. If any sin can be—it, envy, is perhaps the unpardonable sin. God keep and preserve us from its grasp! Is it a wonder that Jesus continually facing this spirit of envy lays in His Gospel so much stress on humility?

When, therefore, the religious success of Jesus

aroused the nation, the rulers—Caiaphas and the elders—were moved with envy. They saw the threatened overthrow of their religious and political importance if this religious revival continued; hence their envy which manifested itself in two directions, viz.: in (*a*) religious intolerance, and (*b*) promptings of worldly interest.

(*a*) It seems like a libel to say or think that religious teachers could be envious of each other, and become intolerant, yet envy cloaked itself under religious guise, and religious intolerance sheltered itself under a profession of attachment to truth and tradition. It is noticeable, as a rule, that there is little religious intolerance when one side is very strong and the other very weak, so that nothing is to be feared from the latter, but instead a feeling of contempt or indifference prevails. But just so soon as the weak becomes strong, then envy finds expression in religious intolerance. We see this animus in the case of Caiaphas and the rulers. Now that this teacher of Nazareth had become popular, and now that His following had grown to such proportions, they

both became threatening and must be stamped out at any cost.

Notice then how this envy showed itself in religious intolerance. First in treachery. The rulers seduced a disciple to betray for a paltry sum his Master. This for the reputed sake of religion, or rather religious domination. Do we wonder that at times religion is scorned and rejected? And again because intolerance is cowardly it dare not arrest Jesus in the daytime, but treacherously seizes Him in the dark almost at midnight.

Next religious intolerance led to deceit. The false witnesses and their false evidence would make one who was seeking the truth burn with indignation at the evident perjury. The Evangelists tell us how absolutely irrelevant was the testimony against the prisoner, how it broke down completely, and how, contrary to legal precedents, the judge tried to make the prisoner incriminate himself.

Again religious intolerance led to injustice in not affording the prisoner a chance to defend

Himself. He was given no council, no witnesses. The evident purpose of the court was to convict, not to find out the truth,—a proceeding not unknown even in modern courts—when prosecuting attorneys become persecuting attorneys, and seem bent on proving the accused at the bar guilty, and do not limit their efforts simply to ascertain the exact truth in the case by giving the prisoner impartial examination. Prosecution then becomes persecution ; and perhaps no persecution is ever so vindictive and cruel as religious persecution. The record of trials for heresy, ancient and modern, testify to the malignant injustice of prosecutors. Thus the trial of Jesus became a mockery of justice, and in gross violation of all law the prisoner was adjudged worthy of death. Then vindictiveness and malice vented themselves on that innocent person in cowardly and cruel treatment. And remember the coward is always cruel. What could be more cruel than the treatment of the cowardly servants of the high priest, who after the condemnation of Jesus “began to spit on Him, and to

cover His face, and to buffet Him, and to say unto Him, Prophecy ! and the servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands ; ” meanwhile the high priest and elders did nothing to stop this wanton and cowardly treatment.

(*b*) But if envy could through religious intolerance countenance such unjust and inhuman treatment, it also manifested itself in promptings of worldly interest. For underlying all action of Caiaphas and the rulers was envy of the increasing favor of Jesus of Nazareth with the people, and the consequent loss of social and political prestige. In the trial when some justification was needed for condemning Jesus, religious scruples were advanced. He was accused of blasphemy ; but earlier when the plot to arrest Jesus was determined upon, Caiaphas was plain enough. In the words of our text he enunciated “ what seemed to him the political necessity for the judicial murder of Christ ; there was no pretense on his part of religious motives or zeal for God. . . . What was the use of discussing about forms of law or about the man ? . . .

He spoke as the bold, unscrupulous, determined man that he was." Worldly interest was at stake, political prestige was endangered. It was folly for the elders to stand upon a few technicalities of law, if they were to maintain their preeminence and their supremacy. With bold arrogance Caiaphas swept aside all legal obstacles. He placed before the council the alternatives of the maintenance of their own interests by the death of Jesus; or else the loss of their power if He should be allowed to live. What could envy answer when confronted by such alternatives? Would it not readily and unscrupulously use its influence and force to overthrow and conquer its rival? Caiaphas knew the strength of the motive to which he appealed. He was clear-sighted, keen in matters of self-interest, arrogant in disregarding the claims and rights of any who might cross his path. The result was not uncertain. The death of Jesus was determined and consummated. And yet Caiaphas was a religious leader and teacher.

Is it possible, we ask, that the act of Caiaphas

should ever be repeated? The answer is found in the question has envy ceased to exist since his days? Have not religious intolerance and envy been marked stains of the Christian Church, spoiling its beauty, blemishing its holiness, destroying its unity, corrupting its truth? Do we not to-day see religious intolerance manifested in scorn and ridicule of others who may be doing good in their way which may not be in our way—whether these be found in our own or in other communions? Has not envy of the work and success of others often called forth criticism and condemnation? Has not divine grace been denied it though the fruits of the Spirit are abundantly manifested? Is not such work often called the work of Beelzebub—thus repeating again that awful spirit of Caiaphas and the religious rulers who in envy attributed the works of Jesus to the power of Beelzebub?

And then when Christians have become imbued with the worldly spirit have they not been only too ready to use the power of the state to crush those in opposition? No more disastrous

alliance for religion pure and undefiled was ever made than that of Church and State. No alliance has done more to corrupt the Christian Church than the conferring of temporal dignities and powers upon religious leaders as was done in Europe after the conversion of Constantine. It was envy allied with worldly interests that made it possible for the Arians to persecute Athanasius, drive him from his see of Alexandria, and cause him to wander as an exile for many years. It was this same lust of temporal power and envy that made it possible for Christians to persecute Christians in the Middle Ages, to perpetrate the horrors of the Inquisition, the fires of Smithfield, and the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day. It was this same spirit of envy which made the established Church of England persecute in England the Puritans, compelling them to flee to this New World where they might exercise freedom of conscience, and enjoy liberty of worship; and in turn made these same persecuted Puritans when dominant here, persecute the feeble and unprotected Churchmen of

this New World. It is the same spirit which to-day may animate one communion to decry or ridicule another, to watch one another with jealous and criticizing eye, to find flaws in each other's doctrine, or conduct or worship, to find motives for disparaging what may seem to be marks of grace, to withhold the hand of fellowship or of kindness, to refuse the word of sympathy and encouragement, to fail to rejoice in the successes and victories over evil crime or heathenism of those outside our own ecclesiastical fences.

As I read the history of the Christian Church and note its rent fragments and schisms, I think I see the satanic spirit of envy responsible for much of our unhappy divisions and strifes, for our unbrotherly recriminations, for our lack of unity and truth. I see this spirit of envy responsible for much of the undoing of the Christian faith, for much of its weakness, its lack of growth, and its failure to mould and shape, to control and elevate, to inspire and transfigure the lives of the men and women of our time.

Ah ! the spirit of Caiaphas and of the rulers—the spirit of envy is not dead to-day. It is gnawing at the very heart of Christendom. It is the spirit which says if the cause of Christ cannot be advanced in our way, but may in another's way, then better it should not advance at all.

Rule or ruin is the axiom of envy, casting stones and stumbling blocks its practice.

It was envy which slew and crucified the innocent Christ nineteen hundred years ago ; it is envy which to-day is rending, yes, crucifying afresh His body the Church.

Well may we Christians in shame and penitence pray, " From envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, Good Lord deliver us."

IV

PONTIUS PILATE

IV

Pontius Pilate

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.—*Matthew* xxvii: 24.

JUDAS ISCARIOT and Pontius Pilate—dare we say twin wandering stars in the moral heavens of human history “to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” The one betrayed, the other crucified Jesus of Nazareth. One initiated, the other concluded the world’s great crime of injustice and judicial murder. What sadder names of what sadder characters can be found to surpass the infamy of these names in Christian history! What representatives of moral tragedy, what types of moral failure! Who has not heard the name Judas, and the name Pilate? The Jew and the Roman, the East and the West linked and united in the per-

petration of the crime of humanity. What more convincing evidence do we need of the unity of man in sin and condemnation, what clearer witness of the common need of a universal Saviour.

As we study the life of Pontius Pilate, we wonder at times whether he could have done what he did while in a state of momentary weakness, whether the proud Roman strength, and the respect for justice did not suffer a temporary eclipse. But we have only to go to profane writers to find out that Pilate's condemnation of Christ is foreshadowed in his earlier conduct and intercourse with the Jews. His administration previous to our Lord's trial had been one long contest between Roman insolence and Jewish fanaticism, between Roman irreligiousness and Jewish religious scrupulosity. One of Pilate's first acts on becoming procurator of Judæa was to move the headquarters of his army from Cæsarea, the former residence of the Roman governor, to Jerusalem, and to bring with him into the Holy City the idolatrous

standards of heathen Rome. This outrage of Jewish religious scruples aroused the people to frenzy. They hurried in crowds to Cæsarea to implore the removal of these standards, and only after five days of sullen obstinacy on the part of the governor, and ill-treatment of the Jews at the hands of his soldiers did Pilate at length yield to the frenzied mob.

Then, too, he had taken the Corban—the sacred money of the Temple treasury—and had put it to the profane use of constructing an aqueduct. This mal-use of the sacred money led to another tumult which was suppressed by the massacre not only of rioters, but also innocent spectators. And once more from Scripture we know that on one occasion he slew some Galileans in the Temple while they were worshipping, and mingled their blood with the blood of the sacrifices.

Pilate's rule had been troubled from the beginning. He hated the Jewish fanaticism, while the Jews hated his insolent imperiousness. He continually quarreled with them, and freely shed

their blood, while they in turn accused him of corruption, cruelty, and maladministration.

One has thus ventured to describe Pilate—
“His aspect is cold and dark. His countenance is bloodless, his eyes restless, near together, and set deep beneath his brows. The features are very fixed and more as if they were made of stone than of flesh. He neither smiles, nor gives evidence on the surface of any emotion either agreeable or painful . . . except that at times a shadow so deep . . . lends to his face the darkness and terrors of night and death. A selfish rapacity, and a heartless disregard of the rights and lives of those who come within his power have made him to be noted not only here in the east, but at Rome also. He is a person into whose hands one would unwillingly fall, who would not perhaps injure or slay so much from feelings of wanton cruelty as from a cold indifference to the life of another; just as there are those who will not, truly, go out of their way to crush an insect, but will not turn aside the breadth of a hair, if one

should perchance lie in their path ; and those who, if through some error, they have been the cause of innocent lives being destroyed, will enjoy none the less their next hour's rest, or their next cup of wine." It was before such a man with this antecedent history and character that Jesus of Nazareth is brought for trial. Can much be hoped for from Pilate ; can we expect much mercy from one who despised the religious fanaticism of the Jews ? Dare Jesus hope for acquittal ?

It is the time of the Passover. Pilate according to his wont has come from Cæsarea up to Jerusalem, to be near at hand in case any riot should arise from religious frenzy. There seem to be indications of some excitement in the rapturous greeting of the Galilean prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. The city had gone into ecstasies on His entrance. He will bear watching. And now just before the Passover, the chief priests early in the morning bring before the governor this very Jesus of Nazareth bound as a prisoner, and charge Him with being a male-

factor. The specific accusations at the first were, He was perverting the nation—this was a charge of conspiracy; He was forbidding to pay tribute to Cæsar—this was revolution; He was claiming to be a king Himself—this was treason. Serious charges, were they true. The Roman governor had been resident long enough in Judæa to know that such charges if true instead of being a cause for accusation or surrender on the part of his countrymen would be an occasion of rejoicing to a people who resented bitterly the burden of the Roman yoke, who hated their imperial masters, and were only too ready to rise in revolt against them, and to assist any one who offered to lead them to victory and independence. No! No! Pilate realized that Jews did not have such tender respect for Roman rule as to be willing to accuse one of their own countrymen for raising the standard of revolt. The charges were evidently a cover to conceal some deeper design. He knew that the popularity and even the authority of the Jewish hierarchy had been threatened by the growing influence of this

Galilean prophet. He cared, however, little for their religious rivalries and feuds. He knew that for envy the chief priests had accused Jesus. He was fully conscious of the innocence of the prisoner before him, whose calm bearing, whose mild countenance contrasted strangely with the malevolent and vindictive vehemence of his accusers. A very brief examination of the prisoner confirms Pilate's intuitions, and he openly tells the chief priests, "I find in Him no fault at all," and he endeavors to set Jesus free. Three different times in the course of the trial, Pilate distinctly asserts the innocence of Jesus: three times he declares, "I find in Him no fault at all." Yet with this firm conviction, and reiterated declaration of the innocence of the prisoner, why does the governor hesitate to act upon his convictions, how is it that eventually he fails to acquit, and to release Jesus?

We ask, why was it that Pilate, the governor and judge, appointed to dispense justice, failed so wretchedly in doing his duty? Stern, unbending Roman, haughty and insolent to these

provincials, what were the causes of Pilate's failure, and utter shipwreck of life?

Into every life there comes some time—and often we are unconscious of it—the supreme trial of our character and life—the crisis of our spiritual history. It is the fatal moment when is poised in the balances our future destiny, and our faithfulness or unfaithfulness in this instance determines for good or evil, for honor or dishonor, for success or failure our whole after life. The event may come into our experience just as one of the many ordinary incidents of our life. There is nothing strange or unusual about the event: it may be the repetition of some past experience: it is something we are accustomed to. Thus Pilate had often sat in the judgment seat. It was no new thing for him to try cases. When, therefore, Jesus stood before him to be tried, it was no new experience, it was nothing extraordinary in the governor's life. And yet natural as was the event, it was the critical moment of Pilate's life; it was the supreme test of his character, and in the test he failed.

The reasons for this failure are not difficult to find. In spite of his sternness Pilate was a weak, irresolute man because he was selfish, self-seeking, untrue and unfaithful.

Consider his selfishness. His life was controlled by thoughts of personal advancement. He was what we would call to-day an opportunist. He had his ear close to the ground listening for the rumblings of coming events, and trying to forecast the way imperial or popular whim and caprice might turn. He was governed by shifting circumstances, not by eternal principles. Though convinced of the innocence of the prisoner, and anxious to release Him, yet when the multitude shouted, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend," the fear of imperial displeasure swept away every instinct of mercy, and consideration of justice; the dread of loss of power and station made him yield himself a tool to injustice and crime. "Circumstances it is often said mould men; but it often depends upon a man himself after what fashion these circumstances shall mould him": whether he shall be

their master or their servant. But the opportunist never plays the hero. The hour comes, and the opportunity comes, but he who depends on popular favor never can rise to the opportunity or control the circumstances. What a moment for Pilate! What a moment in the world's spiritual history, what tremendous consequences hung in the balance! "One expression of an honest and bold determination to take on himself a responsibility from which no Roman magistrate ought ever to have shrunk," would have freed the prisoner, and freed himself. But Pilate was not equal to the emergency. He hesitated, and in that instant his courage and his resolution were swept away in the wild, mad rage of the mob's outcry.

But this surrender would have been impossible had there not been a more serious defect of character. Pilate lacked the primary convictions of truth and righteousness; he manifested a total want of principles—the elemental root of failure was his moral weakness which led him to pervert justice and to disregard right. Failing to pos-

sess any convictions of truth, lacking the principle of righteousness to control life, we can easily account for his wretched vacillation, his base surrender, and his miserable theatrical self-deception in the melodramatic ablutions of his hands. Conscious of the fact that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him, it was the duty of Pilate as judge to acquit the prisoner, no matter who the prosecutors, no matter how eminent in rank. But he vacillated. He dared to argue, to dally with a self-evident duty. He hesitated, he fell. As one has said, "a man may unsettle the verdict of his intellect, it is at his peril that he tampers with the convictions of his conscience. There are plain cases of immediate duty where it is only safe to act at once." The instant doing what we know to be right is sometimes the only certain guarantee of doing right. To fail at the instant, is to lose the opportunity forever, and to involve us in injustice and wrong.

Then see what a coward this lack of righteous principle made Pilate who perhaps on the battle-

field had often faced death without fear. Notice how when he realized his moral weakness, and his absolute failure to do right he tried to deceive himself by the mock heroic act of hand-washing to vindicate himself from blood-guiltiness. "What paltry expedients have a fascination for weak, superstitious, or demoralized men." What scrupulosity we often see in criminals. "The scruples of unscrupulous men are among the marvels of the history of morals." The priests would not enter Pilate's palace fearing ceremonial defilement, yet they did not hesitate to plot murder and falsely accuse the innocent. The rulers did not scruple to seduce with money a disloyal disciple to betray his Master, yet when that disciple brought back that money and cast it in the Temple they took it and said, "It is not lawful for to put it into the treasury because it is the price of blood." Pilate washes his hands to attest his innocence, yet condemns to crucifixion the innocent Jesus. Men may endow churches, build hospitals, and erect colleges, yet not hesitate to wring millions out of the sweat of underpaid

labor. They may give solid gold communion services to churches, yet the very purchase-money of these services may be dishonestly gained. The pity of it all is that this act of hand-washing—actual and metaphorical—is worthless. It but adds hypocrisy to crime. In the case of Pilate it was the seal of hopeless surrender, and the complete demoralization of his life. He became an accomplice in the judicial murder of the innocent prophet of Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

The life of Pilate may be summed up as a tragedy of moral weakness. It is a witness to the truth, that when tried, often against his will, his knowledge, his judgment, the morally weak man will prove unjust, cruel, unfaithful, cowardly, and that moral weakness may be a "source of crimes no less awful than those which spring from deliberate and reckless wickedness." The history of some of England's kings is a sad confirmation of this truth. And the pity of it is, that nothing can be done to help such people. Hands may be stretched out to save them but all

in vain. Pilate's wife did what she could to save her husband from the crime he was drifting into. She warned and implored him, but her troubled dream was unavailing, Pilate was already adrift on that moral ocean of unrighteousness where the darkness shuts out all light, conceals all direction; he was already beyond her reach. It was his past which now hindered his doing right and saving himself. His past government had been unjust, inhuman, corrupt, and he knew it. This past the Jews now held as a threat over his head, if he did not yield to their demand for this innocent life. They might easily fling at him the taunt,—what mattered it to him one life more—innocent or guilty—to him who had already recklessly put many to death. Yet never did Pilate struggle so to do right as now; he wanted to do a humane and righteous act, but his past misconduct hampered him. Is it not a criminal's past which generally frustrates reformation? Well has it been said, "There is nothing which so frustrates good resolutions, and paralyzes noble efforts as the dead weight of past

sins. There are companies in which men cannot utter the fine high-sounding things they would say elsewhere, because there are present those who know how their lives have contradicted them. This is the curse of past sin,—it will not let us do the good we would.” Alas for Pilate! His past now impeded him. He could not do right though he wanted to. He was driven along against his will, farther and farther into the net of circumstances he was dragged, until against his judgment and convictions he was forced to condemn an innocent man to death. He tries to shirk the responsibility of condemning the Christ, he washes his hands to maintain his innocence, but time has not acquitted him. His complicity in the crucifixion can never be forgotten.

“ Pilate dreaded to have any act or part in our Lord’s sentence, and what is the issue? By a marvelous providence this man, whose aim from first to last was to escape being identified in any way with that sentence, now stands alone forever and infamously identified with it. This one

name of Pontius Pilate is more closely associated with our Lord's death than that of any other concerned in it. Annas, Caiaphas, the false priests, the cruel people, even the traitor, Judas, are comparatively set aside. Their names have no place in the Christian creed. But there he stands in the history of the world and the creed of Christendom, for nearly nineteen hundred years recorded as having done that deed, which to the last he struggled against, and tried to persuade himself he did not do. Every day for those centuries—first, from the depths of caves and catacombs where the followers of Him whom he condemned were compelled to hide—then rising to light, swelling, surging, spreading over the earth—in the first lisplings of childhood, in the solemn celebrations of all churches, in the last confessions of faith of the dying; from ten thousand times ten thousand voices has the tremendous witness of all Christendom gone up to heaven, 'He suffered under Pontius Pilate.' "

Unhappy man ending life in an unhappy fate. It is the irony of history that events repeat them-

selves. Tradition tells us that soon after the crucifixion Pilate was recalled to Rome to answer to complaints brought against his evil and corrupt administration. He never returned to Judæa, but was banished by the emperor into Gaul where at length "wearied out with miseries" he ended his life with his own hand, and died an unhappy suicide.

And it is to be noted with serious thought, that all who were implicated in our Lord's condemnation perished miserably. Judas in his remorse hanged himself. Pilate died a suicide. Herod ended his life in exile, and the people who in frenzied madness shouted the awful imprecation, "His blood be on us and on our children," lived to see the curse fulfilled when Jerusalem, the Holy City, was razed to the ground, so that not one stone was left on top of another, when, too, in the awful scenes about the city in that direful siege, so many Jews were crucified that "room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies." And driven from their country, "Still have these wanderers

seemed to bear from century to century and from land to land that burden of blood; and still does it seem to weigh 'on us and on our children.' "

But Pilate has his modern counterparts. He is but a type of all who possessed of an unworthy ambition, are eager for power or place, favor or wealth, at any cost, at any sacrifice; who when put to the moral test break down, surrender to expediency, deny truth, pervert justice, ignore rights. He is a type of all those who are ready to surrender the innocent to popular clamor, who are ready to abandon a cause or a friend when unpopular; who to win favor will be unjust and untrue, who in the mad struggle and rush for the world's prizes will crush the helpless, who to save themselves will condemn the innocent.

Again Pilate stands to-day as the representative of all those morally weak, who shirk responsibility, who are afraid and dare not, or will not decide on some momentous issue and yet must do so, and even while they hesitate and shrink

are sucked into the boiling current of circumstances and are swept away on its foaming tide,—helpless, shattered wrecks tossed hither and thither, having lost self-respect, name, honor, and the very prize which they hoped to win by refusing to decide. Don't we see these modern Pilates by hundreds and thousands abdicating their duties, declining their responsibilities, wretched waverers, not wishing to do wrong yet not daring to do right, hesitating to give a firm and definite decision for God and His Christ. They are trimmers in religion, hence untrue: opportunists in the world, hence unjust.

There is but one safeguard for any of us from the fate of Pilate. It is to have singleness of purpose, and a firm grip of the principle of righteousness,—never to hesitate to obey the dictates of conscience, never to tamper with the convictions of the soul, never to hearken to the urgent claims of expediency as voiced by the cries of the mob, or popular demands; but daring to face any and all consequences, even though doing the right drives one naked from home, strips one of

all the world holds precious, if only conscience and honor are left, if only truth and righteousness have been followed, if only the soul is unstained, and life is upright before God and man.

V

HEROD

V

Herod

And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him in many words but He answered him nothing.—*Luke* xxiii: 8, 9.

DURING the trial of Jesus before Pilate, there comes a lull—for a short while the scene changes. For when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Jesus to Herod, who had legal jurisdiction of Galilee, for judgment. But we are justified in believing that had Pilate cared very much himself to decide the case of Jesus, he would have paid little heed to Herod's rights. But Pilate was not anxious to condemn Jesus. In fact he was eager to get rid of any decision in the matter, he therefore readily accepted what seemed to him a loophole of escape, a chance to shift the decision of the guilt or innocence of

Jesus on some one else. Gladly, therefore, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. Now in all probability the Roman governor would be rid of all responsibility. He would escape the guilt of condemning an innocent man; he would escape yielding to the murderous cry of the multitude, "Crucify Him." It was not justice but moral cowardice which brings Jesus before still another judge and another court. From the Roman Pilate Jesus was thus led to the Idumean Herod who had come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover.

"And when Herod saw Jesus he was exceedingly glad." Was he glad because now he would have a chance to do justice to an innocent resident of his own jurisdiction, and whom the Roman governor seemed inclined to yield to popular clamor; was he glad because now he would have a chance to pay his homage to the great prophet and teacher of Galilee; was he glad because now he would be able to acknowledge himself a disciple, and make some reparation for his father's crimes?

Why was he glad? Who was this Herod?

Let us learn who this Herod was, what his ancestry.

Herod, known as Herod Antipas, was a son of Herod the Great, who about thirty years before had slaughtered the innocent babes of Bethlehem; son of that vindictive, cruel, and jealous king who in his fury never spared life, not even that dearest to himself, who in blind rage and suspicion of conspiracy murdered his wife the noble Mariamne—the last of the great and heroic Maccabean family, and further murdered many of his own sons, so that the Emperor Augustus is reported to have said, “It is better to be Herod’s pig than his son.” What, I ask, are we to expect from the son of such a father?

When Herod the Great died his son Herod Antipas was made tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. On his accession, in accordance with the Herodian instincts and policy, he had built cities and fortresses. He kept court on the lavish scale of an Eastern prince, yet adopted many Roman usages. He gathered about himself a party known as the Herodians, Jewish supporters of

his pretensions to the kingship of Israel. He had married a daughter of Aretas, but the ambition of Herod to be styled king, his intrigues, and his sensuality led him to divorce his wife, and to enter into a criminal connection with Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. What he hoped would be his gain proved his ruin. Herodias became his evil genius. She was ambitious, unscrupulous, cruel and revengeful. Step by step she led Herod into crimes that otherwise he might never have committed.

But this notorious, adulterous connection of Herod with Herodias—his own niece as well as his brother's wife—could not be overlooked by the great preacher of repentance then baptizing in the river Jordan. The tetrarch is boldly rebuked by John Baptist, who said to Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Need we wonder at Herodias' hate of the Baptist, and at her spirit of revenge when thus rebuked. Is it at all surprising that John was seized and cast into prison, that Herodias would have killed him, were it not that Herod

feared the people had he consented to so infamous a deed?

But notice how crime leads to crime, and how the commission of evil is often only deferred when life is corrupt and untrue. One day—Herod's birthday—he made a great banquet for his lords, high captains and chiefs, and after fulness of eating and excess of wine, while the mad revel of the banqueters was at its height, there entered the daughter of Herodias and danced before the besotted king and his company. In the excitement of the moment and in maudlin boastful condition of mind Herod swears by an oath to give the princess, who had just degraded her princely dignity and virgin modesty, whatever she might ask, even to the half of his kingdom. The boast was vain, because at best the tetrarch was subject to the Roman emperor. A hurried consultation with her designing mother determines the daughter's choice. Now was the mother's opportunity of revenge. In came the daughter of Herodias to demand her reward, saying, "I will that thou

give me straightway in a charger the head of John the Baptist."

What will this driveling tetrarch do now? The demand sobers him at once. Will he not give anything rather than this, will he not surrender anything rather than commit injustice and murder? Will he not plead his intoxication of brains and sense as an excuse for release from fulfilling such an iniquitous pledge? We read, "The king was exceeding sorry, yet for his oath's sake—yes his drunken oath—and for their sakes which sat with him he would not reject her." "And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded the Baptist's head to be brought." Thus was sacrificed this noble preacher of righteousness, this prophet of holiness who dared to reprove even kings in their courts; and to this vicious maiden, daughter of a wicked and cruel mother, was given the head of John the Baptist.

Can we not easily predict the end? Herod lived on still trying to deceive himself. He had even now come up to Jerusalem to keep the

Passover, though his life was one great crime, and his hands were stained with innocent blood.

And now while at Jerusalem to keep the Passover comes an opportunity he had long desired, he has at length the chance of gratifying this wish, he is to see Jesus of whom he had heard many wonderful things, and of whom he hoped to see some miracle. Unexpectedly Jesus is sent before him for trial. Herod questioned the prisoner before him in many words, but Jesus answered him nothing. What supreme contempt was this from a prisoner? The king could not understand it. But repeated questioning could elicit no answer. The prisoner remained absolutely silent. And so in desperation Herod with his men of war set at naught and mocked the innocent sufferer, and after they had vented upon Him all the indignities that malice and spite could invent, in derision they arrayed Jesus in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. Herod had already committed one murder, may we not believe that the recollection of that terrible act of injustice now stayed his

hand ; he would send this prisoner away before he could be tempted to repeat his former infamous deed. He will not exercise the rights which are clearly his—a faint spark of justice yet remains, or at least of humanity —— No ! he will not imbrue his hands in blood again. The agony of remorse, and the stings of conscience are too keen and harrowing for him to desire to add any pangs to his already tortured soul ; he will send the prisoner back to Pilate.

But there was no repentance in this act ; and though Herod was not actively guilty of our Lord's death by assenting to it, yet in a certain sense he was negatively guilty in not using the opportunity afforded him of acquitting Jesus when it was in his power to do so. And his end, like that of others connected with the crucifixion of Jesus, was disastrous. Urged by the ambition of his evil genius, Herodias, he went with her to Rome to sue from the emperor the title of king ; but a report of his misdeeds had preceded him, and instead of being honored with the title he sought, he with his wife Herodias

was banished to Gaul, where he died in exile and disgrace, unwept and unloved.

And yet Herod's is not a strange or singular character. There is nothing unusual about him which makes it impossible to repeat him to-day. He was vain, weak, sensual, frivolous, curious, fond of pleasure, fond of sensation, and at the same time superstitious, thinking superstition religion. Are these characteristics so abnormal to-day? Have these frailties of Herod been banished from our life? Are there no men with the same disposition and character? It makes little difference what the first tendency to sin may be, one sin leads to another, and after a while crimes are committed that at first one would shrink from.

Ambition and vanity were among the first of Herod's temptations to crime. He had all the Herodian ambition of his father for power and place. Like his father, he was artful, cunning, and fond of display, though he lacked his father's vigor and genius. His ambition and policy led him to imitate Roman habits. In

hope of winning imperial favor he paid a slavish subserviency to the emperor's whims. He built cities and fortresses and named them after the emperor and his relatives. Yet in spite of Romanizing tendencies he kept the Jewish feasts, and observed the ceremonial law. He had two faces—one turned to Rome, the other to Jerusalem. It was this cunning which drew from our Lord the exclamation concerning Herod, "Go tell that fox." Have we not two faced men and women to-day—one face turned to God, the other to the world?

Again we notice in Herod a fondness for sensation and the curious. When he heard of the miracles of Jesus he wished to see some miracle wrought. Pilate's sending of Jesus to him for examination was just the thing to gratify his love of the curious. Here was the chance of a new sensation, something he had longed for. His court had been haunted by singers, dancers, jugglers. They had ceased to possess novelty. But the presence of Jesus was something which promised a sensation far surpassing any former

sensation. "He was exceeding glad to see Jesus." Now he would have a chance to behold this miracle worker display His skill. The king's request could only be construed as a compliment. He put Jesus "on the level of a new dancer or singer ; he looked on His miracles as a species of conjuring or magic." What must have been Herod's surprise when the prisoner not only did not exhibit His miraculous powers, but did not even answer the many questions asked. What a stinging rebuke, what a complete collapse of the king's hopes of amusement. As in Herod's case, so in that of many to-day, the religion of Jesus is but another form of amusement or entertainment, a relief from the dreariness and tedium of life, a change from the monotony of the secular every-day world. They go to church to be entertained, or they go for some intellectual titillation ; they go to hear fine music, or they go for æsthetic gratification afforded by ornate ritual, and because they have been in what is called a church they somehow fancy they are religious, as if a church

sanctified religion, instead of religion sanctifying a church. In such cases where has been the communion of the soul with its God; where has been any divine voice speaking to that life? Just as when Christ was questioned in many things by Herod and remained silent, so in these cases Christ does not speak. Is not the retribution for sensation in religion the consequent sterility of result, the manifest absence of spiritual power, the utter lack of inspiration and of stimulus to correct and guide lives into truth and righteousness? Those who come for sensation come not for God's sake, but only to seek their own amusement or the gratification of curiosity. Is it surprising if God is silent and answers nothing?

But love of sensation was not all. Herod's infamous connection with Herodias proved him to be without conscience or regard for the purity and sanctity of life. Amid the licentiousness of those days, the court of Herod and the king himself set the example of profligacy and wantonness. By his conduct Herod defied all moral law. He gave himself up to gross and sensual

indulgence, and by the revels of his court he sanctioned the wildest license. I suppose it is impossible for us to realize the abandonment of the morals of those days of which an apostle wrote that "it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret": and it is quite possible to believe that the same apostle would give little countenance to the publication of our modern moral scandals that so often disfigure our public press, and are scattered broadcast over the land.

But with all his immorality—as so often is the case in crime—there was a haunting superstition in Herod's life, and a false and vain show of religion. We read that after Herod had imprisoned John for rebuking his criminal conduct, the king would from time to time send for the prisoner, and heard him gladly, and did many things at John's bidding,—yet he did not put away Herodias whose connection with him was the one foul crime which was poisoning his life. Yet in spite of this life Herod thought himself religious. "He retained his vices, yet took an

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interest in heavenly things." He was scrupulous about rites and ceremonies, he was curious about religious matters, he was ready to question Jesus about His teaching. Even now he was in Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Yes, Herod was quite strict in the observance of Jewish ceremonial law, no matter what he did in regard to God's moral law. But it is one thing to talk about religion, or to be curious about religious forms and ceremonies, it is another thing to be religious. Our apparent religiousness may manifest itself in "questions in many words." We want to know,—but why? Is it to believe, and then to put belief into practice, or only to gratify curiosity, or to deaden remorse? Do you suppose Herod intended to do anything if Jesus had bidden him? Do you think he had the slightest idea of conforming his conduct to any appeals Jesus might make? So with many to-day. They profess to have doubts, they are skeptical, they ask many religious questions, but do they ask to remove doubts, do they inquire that they may win faith, or only to gratify their taste for

dialectics, to find occasion for argument, to exhibit their logic or rhetoric, to see if they cannot overthrow the evidences of the Christian teacher? The purpose of inquiry may not be at all to know Christ and His truth, but to show themselves off; not to reform life, but to inform the mind; not to change the heart, but to gratify the intellect; not to redeem the soul, but to display pride. In such cases the only answer is the answer of silence. Let our adversary try to shame us into retort, even as Herod tried to provoke Jesus; but as our Master did, so should we, we should I think always treat the question of frivolous curiosity even though it be on religion with absolute silence.

Then most pitiable of all, Herod was weak, yet like most weak men did not want to be thought weak. When he had sworn with an oath to give the dancing daughter of Herodias even the half of his kingdom, he little thought it would involve him in the violation of justice, and the murder of the innocent. Hence when he was asked for the head of John the Baptist, the weak

and cowardly king dare not repudiate his oath, or stand out against the demand. In the presence of his guests all waiting to hear what reply he might make to the infamous demand, he would maintain what seemed consistency even though it led to crime. It was the forced and spurious show of courage of the coward. But notice how involuntary conduct in sudden and unexpected emergencies is often one of the truest tests of character and life. When one is taken unawares, suddenly tempted or tried, then the real habitual disposition, tendency, belief, or character is brought out. This test is like the flash light in darkness, a sudden and instantaneous revelation of life which under the cloak of convention and external conformity, propriety or habit is often concealed not only from others, but also from self. To be confronted unexpectedly with the need of a decision, act, or issue is often a revelation of pitiable weakness as opposed to formal strength, of actual unbelief as opposed to formal faith, of unmitigated selfishness as opposed to outward courtesy. Unfaith-

ful to his God and to his conscience, not ashamed of any crime or sin, Herod would yet be faithful as he thought to his half-drunken oath, and appear honorable and true before his companions. What honor! as honorable to tell a second lie in order to conceal the first, as honorable to steal with which stealings to win a reputation for generosity, as honorable to take another's life in a duel after having first insulted him. Honor! Nay—criminal weakness and cowardice. "It was not so much Herod's regard for the oath which he had taken, but his shrinking from the taunt, or whispered jest, or contemptuous gesture of the assembled guests if they should see him draw back from his plighted word. A false regard for public opinion, for what people will say or think of us in our own narrow circle was in this as in so many other instances an incentive to guilt instead of a restraint."

Have we escaped the weak cowardly fear of what people will say or think of us, thus often impelling us to do wrong when we know it so to

be ; have we escaped thinking ourselves religious simply because for various reasons—whether of curiosity or sensation, intellectual gratification or superstition, worldly advantage or propriety—we may be found in God's house joining in His worship or singing His praises though this religious observance produce no vital effect in our life in promoting truth and righteousness, justice and honesty ? Have we gained purity of thought and life, though we have escaped the actual lusts of the flesh, and the commission of sensual deeds ? Let us test ourselves by our involuntary conduct, our unexpressed wishes, our concealed thoughts. Let us remember that there are Herods not only without but within the church. Where do we stand ?

VI

BARABBAS

VI

Barabbas

Ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the passover; will ye, therefore, that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again saying, not this man but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.—*John* xviii: 39, 40.

THE crisis of our Lord's Passion culminated when to the people was offered by Pilate the choice, "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas or Jesus, which is called Christ?"

We can imagine the intense anxiety of the Roman governor as he put this question to the assembled multitude. We can believe that weak and vacillating as he was, he must have hoped the people would not hesitate to choose Jesus. Were they not Jews, waiting anxiously for the Messiah; did not these crowds only a few days before go into rapturous ecstasies over this same Jesus as He came from Bethany to Jerusalem? It

was only natural that the Roman governor should believe that they who a few days before had cut down palm-branches to spread them in the way of this Prophet of Galilee would be only too glad now to demand His release and freedom.

We can imagine, too, the intense excitement of the chief priests and elders who had accused Jesus before Pontius Pilate; how anxious they would be that the multitudes should decide for Barabbas the robber, not Jesus the prophet.

We can imagine, again, how anxious must have been the disciples of Jesus, if any mingled with the crowds before the governor's palace. Would the multitude choose Jesus their Master, or Barabbas the murderer? What a tumult of anxiety must have heaved in the heart of John the beloved disciple, if he now stood in the crowd waiting for the mob to decide his Master's fate. How anxious must Peter have been, if he, too, was present in that raging rabble, and beheld his Lord whom only a few hours before he had so shamefully denied. And those others that had fled—Andrew, Thomas, James and the

rest,—had they rallied courage to mingle in this shouting, moving mass before the governor's palace? Had they seen from a distance their Master insulted and mocked, buffeted and spit upon? Had they seen Him brought out thorn-crowned before the people and heard Pilate's speech, "Behold the Man!" If so, how fearfully anxious and nervous they would be to know the decision of this fickle mob in which they stood.

And passing from earth to heaven how anxious, humanly speaking, must have been the Father-heart—God the Father as He too waited to know the decision of this heaving multitude—what would they do with His only begotten Son? And with the divine anxiety may we not couple that of the celestial hierarchy—the angels and archangels and all the heavenly host,—who, if they rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, must have been supremely anxious to know what would be the fate of their Lord—the Lamb upon the Throne.

That moment was a supreme moment in the

world and heaven. It seems as if the universe would cease its motions to listen with awe for the decision that was to come—the reply that was to be given to the governor's question. Upon this answer depended vital and irrevocable issues of time and eternity. Upon this answer hung the immortal destinies of countless souls. Upon the answer of man hung the fate of the Son of God. What a moment in the world's and man's history! Can we not believe that everything created would pause and hush in this solemn anxious moment! And hark! Now comes ringing from ten thousand throats in hoarse, mad cry, and mighty roar, in a shout full of wild rage, and angry tumult, heard above every other noise, "Away with this fellow—crucify Him, crucify Him. Not this Man but Barabbas." Ah! irrevocable doom, irreparable choice! The world, as Adam, is once more tried, and has once more fallen. The old Adam has spoken in his sons' wild cry, "Not this Man but Barabbas." The choice has revealed the sinful nature, and the diabolical passions of man.

Barabbas or Jesus? Who were they? The sacred writers tell us little of Barabbas, but what little they do tell stamps him indelibly. He was a notable, *i. e.*, a notorious prisoner, conspicuous among criminals, well known perhaps in the land for his character and deeds. He had been guilty of insurrection and sedition. In his sedition he had committed murder; in his insurrection he had probably pillaged—for we read “Barabbas was a robber.” Bandit, robber, insurrectionist, murderer, he was noted, he was feared. Now he was safely lodged in prison. His lawless career was checked. His robberies, his murders were now ended. The prison, if anywhere, was the safe place for him, and peaceful citizens could now breathe more freely, and dwell more securely. Yes. Barabbas was a notable prisoner, one whom we would scarcely wish to see at liberty.

Barabbas or Jesus? Whom would they choose? Surely it would seem there could be no second thought when the characters of the two men were known. For on the other hand

who is Jesus, the other prisoner whom the chief priests wished condemned? Only a few years before there burst upon the people of Judæa and Galilee a new teacher known as Jesus of Nazareth. It is true He did not have the regular rabbinic training. He did not have the sympathy or support of the religious leaders. Still He taught as one having authority. His teaching had attracted thousands. His gracious words had comforted many sad hearts. His parables had opened new meanings in life. His presence had aroused new motives, desires, and inspirations. Then His labors had not been confined to teaching. He had also healed. Yes wonderful had been His healing power. Lepers were cleansed, the blind received sight, the lame made to walk, all manner of sickness and of disease were healed by this Prophet of Nazareth. Death itself was overcome—for even the dead He had raised to life. Further the forces of nature were under His control. Water He had turned to wine. With five loaves and two fishes He had fed five thousand. The raging blast, and tu-

multuous waves He had quieted with His words, "Peace be still!" At His command the nets let down into the sea were drawn up with fish full to breaking. His whole life had been one of comforting, teaching, and beneficent mercy. Teacher, healer, prophet, Saviour, He had devoted all His powers for the benefit of His people.

Here then was the choice presented to the people,—“Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas or Jesus which is called Christ?”—a murderer or a Saviour, a robber or a restorer, one who had struck terror into people’s hearts, or One who comforted His people’s griefs and sorrows? Could there be any reasonable doubt that the people would choose Jesus? Was not the governor’s expectation natural? But woful to man’s hopes—even here as so often the unexpected happens—the vehement cry is returned, “Not this Man but Barabbas.”

What a choice this of Barabbas for release involved. It was a choice of violence instead of mercy, lawlessness instead of law, rebellion in-

stead of loyalty, crime instead of rectitude, the guilty instead of the innocent, a robber instead of a benefactor, a murderer instead of a Saviour. Could right be more completely crushed, and wrong be more triumphantly victorious in such a choice? So unnatural, so unexpected Pilate would think, we too would think. The choice stuns us, upsets all our notions of justice. We believe such a decision cannot be natural. We shudder at it, we resent it, we repudiate it with all our heart and might. We are ready to condemn both Pilate and the people. Is this not so? But pause. Consider the choice more carefully, measure it by the history of the world, and the experience of life—yea even of our own limited experience—and is the choice "Not this Man but Barabbas," so strange, unexpected, or unnatural?

The choice men make is representative of their wishes, a revelation of their desires, a key of their inmost heart. We have certain stereotyped forms for conduct—formal and perfunctory—by which we measure the actions, wishes and choice

of others, and when these fail to come up to this formal standard we are ready to accuse and to blame. But how is it when we apply the same standard to ourselves? Do we not see the same failure, the same inability to rise to the plane to which we had expected others to rise? Yet in our own case does it seem unnatural, unexpected if we fail? Do we not excuse our failure by adducing extraordinary circumstances, calling our case exceptional? Was then the choice of Barabbas instead of Jesus so strange? The very fact that we have a choice involves selection, the taking one, and leaving the other. And if we consider the choice of Barabbas, its unexpectedness disappears when we remember the occasion of it, and the influences which determine choice.

It was the custom for the governor to release at the passover any prisoner the people might demand. This was a yearly privilege. Hence when this particular year the people had the usual choice offered them, they would exercise their right in the same way as in times past. Were they to know that the choice this particu-

lar year was so momentous, so fearful for time and eternity? Were they to know the supreme importance of the occasion and the great need of exercising their choice justly, righteously? Would they not be governed this year by the many motives that had governed them in past years? Would not the same influences be brought to bear, would not the same party feeling, or religious prejudices be appealed to as in former years? Would not the party leaders and managers,—the chief priests and rulers—determine how the people should choose, and would not the people simply accept, and by their choice register this decision? Now, I ask, is this unnatural, unexpected? How is it with us? It is election time. The political issues are before us. How do people act? How vote? Do they consider the paramount and supreme interests of their city, state, or country? Do they vote according to fixed convictions of righteousness and truth? Do they place principles before party, patriotism before partisanship, country before individuals? Let some one outside—some wise,

disinterested and impartial observer watch to see how we act. Do we not go according to our wont, and even though the question before us be of vital importance to our welfare, do we not choose and vote, not according to the importance of the question or the issue, but as we have always done—submit our wish and our choice to the influences that have in past years directed and controlled us? Do not a few leaders generally decide for the mass, while we do no more than register their decision? Was it then so important to the mob before the governor's palace whom they chose—Barabbas or Jesus? What was the ruler's choice, who was their candidate? Did not the chief priests urge the people to choose Barabbas? The people had always obeyed them before, why not now? Why should they now differ from their leaders and choose differently? Of course they voted according to their leader's dictation and cried, "Not this Man but Barabbas."

Was this choice, then, so unnatural? We look at this throng, and hear its cry after these

many centuries, and we compare its conduct with ours to-day, and should we be surprised—was its action so strange? It would have been strange had it acted otherwise. The strange thing about many irretrievable decisions in life is, that the occasions which call for them are not strange or singular, but that they come up in the regular orderly course of our life in a matter of fact way. The choice presents no unfamiliar aspect, no unusual face. We have been in the same situation before, perhaps frequently, perhaps regularly, why then should any single occasion be so much more important than another, why should we be so careful to exercise our rights and privileges lawfully, truly, justly in one particular instance and not in others? There is no reason. Righteousness is not sporadic. It is a habit gained from fixed and firm principles, from a steadfast adherence to truth and justice on small as well as on large occasions, in little as well as in great matters. The crisis comes and we know it not, and our action will be determined not by the importance of the question, or

the seriousness of the choice, but according to our general habit and practice in years past. Hence in this choice, made in the regular exercise of their annual privilege, the Jews decided with their eyes open, with perfect deliberation, with fair understanding of the facts of the case, and the character of the individuals. They knew who Barabbas was, and who Christ. But they were accustomed to be influenced in times past, and now they were still subject to the same influence. They were not independent thinkers and actors. They did as they were told, not as their consciences or their sense of justice might direct. We say how weak, how unfortunate. But I ask—is it different to-day? Would we, do we act differently?

Yes, unfortunate indeed was the choice because of its limitation and irreparableness. The choice was limited to one—not Barabbas *and* Jesus, but Barabbas *or* Jesus? One chosen, the other had to be left, one acquitted, the other had to be condemned, the one liberated, the other had to be crucified. Then, too, the choice so

lightly made was irreparable. There could be no undoing of it. It became final for the choosers as well as for the one chosen. It fixed the doom of the innocent. There was no redress, no appeal, no escape. The consequences must now follow the choice, there was no room for repentance. The people had "denied the Holy and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them." This choice could never be revoked or cancelled. It must stand forever in the world's history an irreparable fact. The cry of that multitude must forever go ringing down the centuries to the limits of time, and echo forever in the Christian consciousness. Ah! that hoarse, mad cry must even mount up to the courts of heaven, and echo and reecho through those celestial arches—"Not this man but Barabbas." A murderer released, and the Son of God murdered. Could any choice be more tragic?

Had we been in that multitude while the chief priests were urging the people to choose Barabbas and reject Jesus, we perhaps fondly imagine that we would have resisted their influence, we

would have shown more strength of character, greater independence, we would have refused to do wrong to an innocent man—our manhood and sense of justice would have urged us to stand by the guiltless, we would have chosen Jesus, we would have rejected Barabbas no matter what others did. As we read the sacred story and the tragic crime do we not lament the blindness as we call it of the people, and wonder at their wilful conduct so pitiably weak, so unjust? Had we been there we say we never could have done as that riotous mob, nor countenance their action. Yet I ask are there not mobs to-day? Do not riot, injustice, and persecution of the innocent and harmless continue? Again in our life in the world, in our business, pleasures, ambitions, in the mad chase for wealth, influence, or power, in the hot pursuit to gratify our lusts, desires, and appetites, do we not hear the question put to us “Barabbas or Jesus?” Life is a perpetual interrogation. We are continually confronted with the choice of truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, sacrifice or indulgence, holiness or sin—

what are they but the repeated question, "Jesus or Barabbas?"

What is life to-day for many but the complete spiritual shipwreck of their souls,—the absolute abandonment of Jesus? How many, when the choice is offered, refuse to become a disciple of Jesus; who influenced by the thought or actions of friends and acquaintances will have nothing to do with Him; who virtually by their deeds say as loudly as did the Jews of old with voice, "Not this man but Barabbas"? How many Christians also abandon their Master by forswearing their Christian character, by giving up their Christian living, by deserting Christ and taking up with the world.

Ah! there comes to every life to-day the choice, and with so many it is Barabbas, not Christ. We reject the Christ every time we persecute the innocent, deliberately do them injustice, and hurry them to ruin or death by our iniquitous treatment. Do we want to be put to the test to-day, do we want to choose? Would we choose Jesus if offered to us, would we have done

so nineteen hundred years ago? Ask yourselves how your lives compare with His holy life, how you prepare to follow in His holy footsteps? Ask yourselves how much joy it gives you to imitate His life of patience, gentleness, sacrifice, surrender? Ask yourselves how you love holy men, holy places, holy things, how cheerfully you obey the commands of God, how gladly you resign the pleasures of this earth, how detached you live in this life? Yes, ask yourselves how much does the thought of God, and the love of God enter into your hearts to displace the love of the world? To what poor have you broken your bread; to what naked have you given clothing; to what sick have you given comfort; to what persecuted innocent ones have you given shelter, sympathy, assistance; how have you stood for the truth, for justice, for right? Ask yourselves how you have relieved the distressed, the friendless, the vile of this earth—the publicans, the sinners, the outcasts of life? What have you done for them, any one of you for any one of these? Answer these questions, and the true

reply will determine whether if you had been in that mob, at that Passover season in Jerusalem, whether you would have stood by the innocent Christ or shouted to condemn Him. Put to the test now even as then, and the shouts of numbers to-day is the same as of old, as vehement, as cruel, as blasphemous—"Not this man but Barabbas."

VII

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS (GOOD FRIDAY)

VII

The Meaning of the Cross (Good Friday)

They crucified Him.—*John* xix : 18.

WE Christians talk much of the cross, it is a question whether we bear it much. We talk of its shamefulness, do we realize it? The cross is not a theory, but a fact, not a poetic speculation but a cruel reality, not an ornament but a mode of daily discipline, not simply a symbol to be put upon our altars and placed above our churches, but an experience to be stamped into our lives.

The distance in time between Calvary of the first century and this twentieth century, the familiarity with the thought of the cross has greatly blurred for us its awfulness and humiliation, its agony and its shame. As one of our modern writers has said, " Perhaps the simplicity of the symbol has cast a glamour over the modern mind

and blinded us to its strenuous meaning. Art, for instance, with an unerring instinct of moral beauty, has seized the cross and idealized it. It is wrought in gold and hung upon the neck of light-hearted beauty; it is stamped on the costly bindings of Bibles that go to church in carriages; it stands out in bold relief on churches that are filled with easy-going people. Painters have given themselves to crucifixions, and their striking works are criticised by persons who praise the thorns in the crown, but are not quite pleased with the expression on Jesus' face, and then return to their pleasures. Composers have cast the bitter passion of Jesus into stately oratorios, and fashionable audiences are affected unto tears. Jesus' cross has been taken out of His hands and smothered in flowers; it has become what He would have hated—a source of graceful ideas and agreeable emotions. When Jesus presented the cross for the salvation of His disciples, He was certainly not thinking of a sentiment which can disturb no man's life, nor redeem any man's soul, but of the unsightly beam which must be set up

in the midst of a man's pleasures, and the jagged nails that must pierce his soul."

The cross was not idealized by the evangelists. But we have told to us the stern and awful reality of the crucifixion without the veil of glamour. There is something most tragic in the simple narrative "they crucified Him."

And now after the lapse of nearly nineteen hundred years we ask again the meaning of the cross, what does it stand for, what does it represent?

We will consider what the meaning of the cross is in the life of Christ, and next in the life of man.

First, in the life of Christ. The cross haunted Him from infancy, its shadow fell upon His cradle at Bethlehem. He had to be taken to Egypt to escape the murderous wrath of Herod. Then during His long interval of seclusion in Galilee He was preparing for the cross. His outlook was the dim and distant height of Golgotha. A well known "work of modern art shows Jesus standing at the door of a carpenter's

shop and stretching Himself after a long day's labor. The setting sun falling on His outspread arms makes the shadow of the cross, and carries terror into His mother's heart. This attitude of the body was typical of the attitude of the soul." His face beheld this shadow continually until He came face to face with the reality. We ask what is the meaning of the cross and the reply is, it means sacrifice. Where there is no sacrifice there can be no true cross. The true cross, the cross of Christ, the cross of the gospels is only found in sacrifice. With Christ it began in His self-renunciation of the glories of heaven. In heaven itself is found the cross. We see the beginning of the sacrifice in the offer of the Son of God to empty Himself and to make Himself of no reputation, to take upon Him the form of a servant and to be made in the likeness of man. The cross is rooted in the dawn of creation. The wood was already in Eden, where was the "tree of life." The first earthly step to Golgotha was taken in the Incarnation and in the nativity at Bethlehem. Calvary is only the culmination,

the last scene in the world's tragedy of sin and salvation.

Then in the public ministry of our Lord we see the doctrine and exemplification of the cross. He had no settled home—as He Himself said, “the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” His is a ministry not for self but for others. His life is a sacrifice of time, of strength, of service. He is subject to rebuff, to criticism, to opposition. He is misrepresented, He is persecuted. Not a step did He take which was not watched, not a word did He utter which was not criticised, not a miracle did He perform which was not challenged. His influence with the people was perpetually thwarted and minimized.

But if the cross meant sacrifice it also was a stumbling block. See how it bars the way to advancement. He who carries the cross has few comrades, few followers. The chief Cross-bearer found this out. How the doctrine and sight of the cross scattered the disciples. How they fled when faithfulness might mean crucifixion. How

soon they abandoned the Man who for nearly three years had been preaching to them the doctrine of the cross, a doctrine which they professed to receive and to accept. Yes, the cross stands for denial and desertion. It is the great heart searcher and divider. It reveals the real state of feeling, it proves or disproves easy profession.

Then once more the cross in the life of Christ stands for the endurance of injustice. Perfidy and covetousness had betrayed Him; envy had plotted His destruction; political expediency delivered Him up to be crucified. One cannot rise up from the reading of the crucifixion without being impressed with its extreme injustice. We read that Pilate the Roman governor was anxious to release Jesus. Three times he proposes to release the prisoner against whom no just accusation can be brought, whose whole bearing presented a wonderful combination of innocence, courage, and patience, but each time the roar of envy and injustice drowned the half hearted proposal of release:—"Crucify Him," was

shouted more vehemently than "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." The cross means the endurance of injustice, and surrender to the spite and malice of persecutors.

Then once more the cross in the life of Christ stands as the eternal witness of God's love for man. It testifies to His unwearied appeal to man; it reveals the divine method of reconciliation.

Consider now what the meaning of the cross is in human life. What it must mean in the life of each of us, in your life, in my life. It is not a toy or ornament, it is not some poetic symbol but a stern and cruel reality in life. It reverses the whole human conception of life by the introduction of a new principle that the conquest of life is attained only by the sacrifice of life, that we gain life by its surrender, that the cross is to be taken up daily and borne forward. Only a divine example could make such a principle acceptable. The world's method and principle would be to reject the cross, and to repudiate the principle of sacrifice of self. It would fight

against surrender of self for others. It would insist not on humility but on sovereignty, not on meekness but pride, not on forgiveness but revenge. Sacrifice is not an earthly idea. Its birthplace is heaven, its originator is God. It has been transplanted from heaven to earth, it has been planted in the hearts of men by the planting of the cross on Calvary.

Again the cross in human life stands for the awfulness and reality of sin, and the need of salvation from sin. There might have been for all we know other methods had God chosen them—but He has chosen only one method for man's salvation, namely through the cross of His Son. "There is no salvation of the soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross." And how real and how awful must sin be when it can be removed only by the death of the innocent, the just suffering for the unjust, the Son of God becoming Man to redeem man. Interpret sin in the light or rather gloom and darkness of Gethsemane and Calvary, and do we not realize then its fearful reality, and the infinite sacrifice

offered to redeem man from its consequences and power? What sort of attitude should it cause us to take to sin, how Calvary must make us hate and abhor sin.

Then again the cross in human life means a new standard, and a different method. It stands in eternal opposition to the world's ways, thoughts, ideals. At His trial our Saviour said, "My kingdom is not of this world," meaning that His methods, His habits, His standards were different from those of the world. Think of some of the precepts of the divine kingdom where the cross is the standard. "Whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant." Again "whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Or again, "what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul," and once more, "whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose it for My sake shall find it." Yes, the cross in human life means that we must change our

natural conceptions of greatness and honor, rewards and successes. That another judgment, another standard are involved in the entrance of the cross into human life. And what is it makes it so hard in the world to-day for us to reconcile ourselves to life? Is it not that theoretically accepting the cross we have not accepted its standard and method? We are trying to invite into our home God and Mammon, we are trying to entertain them at the same time. Is it a wonder that discord reigns, that we feel the struggle and the conflict, that we are tossed now here, now there. Ah! why not end this wretched strife! Why not realize that the standard of the cross and that of the world are incommensurable—that one looks to eternity, the other to mortality, that one looks to character, the other to pleasure, one looks to sacrifice, the other only to gratification.

Then, too, the entrance of the cross into life, as it reveals the awfulness of sin, reveals also the need of righteousness and holiness. It is one thing to realize our degradation and disgrace, it

is another thing to remove them. Thus the realization of sin is but one step in the way of the cross, the full path must lead to sanctification. Reconciliation by the cross involves a changed attitude to God and a changed nature. The sinner must become a saint, the love of sinning must change to the love of righteousness, enmity to God must change to love to Him.

How much the cross means when we begin to think of it. And does it not result in consequences to the individual—to those who are bearing their crosses after their Great Leader? Yes. If we bear our cross, does it not involve for us a crucifixion likewise? Oh, brethren, we who talk of bearing our crosses, how often we complain when we come to our crucifixion, and yet, I ask, if you have not already thought of it, I ask why are you bearing the cross if it be not that you must be crucified upon it, must bear all its shame, humiliation, pain and desertion? “The disciple is not above his Master, it is enough that he be as his Master.” And when God or even the world calls us to our crucifixion, the cruci-

fixion of our hopes, our joys, our successes, when on the cross we are raised by suffering, by loss, by bereavement, what is this but following in the footsteps of your Saviour? What is it but the proof of the truth that if we are to rise with Christ we must also be crucified with Him? Think of this at times, brethren, when some mystery of life darkens your home, and you seem to stand baffled, alone, deserted, or persecuted, remember that you as a disciple of the crucified as well as risen Christ must enter your Gethsemane and climb your Calvary. The painful journey, and the heavy load are not all. The jagged nails must pierce you, and you must be lifted up for the scorn and derision of men.

Will not this likeness of suffering to Christ's enable you to interpret much of the sorrow, many of the mysteries, many of the wrongs which enter your lives? Think how He had to endure undeserved, unjust punishment. You, too, may have to endure the same. If you have accepted the cross as the standard of your life, then you must also accept its consequences. You must take

pattern after the Great Cross-bearer. You must endure affliction. You must submit to insult, injustice, cruelty, oppression. You must endure slander, malice, hate. You must endure denial and desertion. You must be willing to forego the prizes, the hopes, the successes of this world. Yes, even when at times you seem to be reaching them, and strangely the world is applauding you, you must be ready to hear the distant murmur forewarning a change when applause will be changed to curse. You must prepare for the thorns, the nails, the cross. Do you see the vision, do you realize the standard? The cross is not a poetic delusion, a historical romance, an idealization of suffering; but it is even now and to-day a stern reality, a daily discipline, an experience stamped into our lives. They crucified Him—the Christ. They may crucify you—the followers of that Christ.

VIII

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION THE ANSWER TO THE
ENIGMA OF DEATH (AN EASTER SERMON)

VIII

Christ's Resurrection the Answer to the Enigma of Death (An Easter Sermon)

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.—*I Cor. xv: 22.*

THE great mystery of life and of death is a mystery we cannot escape. A time of health, or prosperity, or pleasure may dim or veil this mystery for a while, but some severe sickness, some loss of beloved friend, relative, or child; the waning of strength, the lengthening of age, the swift whitening of hair; the deeper and deeper furrowing of the lines of care and time on the face; the growing up of the young to maturity whom we have all along been thinking of as infants or children,—these and many more circumstances of this changing and fleeting mortal life impress us with the fact that our lives are being borne on the swift tide of time to that unknown land, that soon for us the light of day

must fade forever; and so the almost forgotten mystery of life and death becomes for us real again. Thus we stand face to face with death with a suddenness which is almost startling, but the mystery remains as impenetrably shrouded as ever, and we wonder and fear and hope.

The outlook on the world is an outlook of life always ending in death. Is this all—we ask? We look out on the world of nature and we see things live to die, we see animals live to die, we see men live to die. Is death the finality for man? Many answers or attempted answers have been given. Surmises, hopes, poetry, philosophy, dreams have all been given as answers, but they have failed to give any answer of certainty. At best these answers have only been a “maybe.” Like a swimmer we drop as it were our feet to touch the bottom and find none. We try again and again, but still we feel in vain. Once more, we send our voice out into the void of the past, or we project it into the formless future, and we hear an echo perhaps of our own question, or else not even an

echo is heard ; silence prevails. Thus we may ask the world of nature what its answer is and we receive no reply. Facts seem to say, in the grave is silence for evermore. "In Adam all die." And so there has ever been a mournfulness about the mystery of death that has clouded the mystery and the joy of life. The shadow clings—the ghost will not away. The greater the light the deeper the shadow, the madder the joy and revelry the more insistent the intrusion of the ghost to spoil and mar the joy and mirth at the feast. The strongest purposes seem madness and a sheer delusion ; the greatest deeds seem like writing in the sand by the seashore ; the most potent life like a spark of light which flashes only to disappear. All life seems so broken, unfinished, particularly all individual life.

That which we severally call "I" we wish to remain "I" forever. But yet in spite of our stormy wishes there seems to be a fragmentariness to all individual life. Its purpose is so soon cut off, its length of days so short at best, its powers so weak. Is there no answer to the question of

the heart which yearns for some reply? Ah! the passionate demands and stormy questions of men and life—is there no answer to them? Must things always be so unsettled, must men never know wherefore they are made, must the immortal mind be nothing but mortal dust? Look everywhere for a reply, and you find none, neither in life nor philosophy, nor poetry, nor dreams until you come to the religion of the Son of God, who to the questions and queries says in calm and solemn tones of certainty yet triumph, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Then later come the words of His apostle to assure us, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The one and only answer which has been given without doubt or hesitation is the Christian answer; and the only reply to the mystery of the fragmentary life of man is the risen life of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the type of all human resurrection, it is the full and final answer to the enigma that has puzzled all ages and all peoples—the enigma of personal immortality.

Let us consider the mystery of death this Easter day—the one day in the year which in the midst of a mortal and decaying world can buoy us up with immortal hope and joy, can open our mouths to sing with triumph, “O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?” What has the teaching of this day to say to the question of the fragmentariness of human life, and what is its answer to the enigma of death?

Here is a strong life in whose body the blood courses with vigorous tide. There is no suggestion of weakness or decay. The eye is bright, the step is firm, the will dominant. Yet in a moment without a minute's warning all this fair, strong, godlike life is ended. The vigorous strength has gone, that powerful form is helpless, the myriad purposes and plans are ended, that warm beating heart is cold. The body that could stand and defend itself is now utterly helpless, unable to resist the insults or the mutilations that some envious rival, or some inquisitive anatomist might inflict. We stand and wonder at

it all. And we ask is this all? We can believe that the natural end of weakness, sickness and slow decay is death, but can we for strong and young life? Is not this sudden cutting off a seeming violation of nature, a frustration of the design and purpose of life? Ah! this fragmentary strength of man, what use is it, if this be the end, the only end? We ask the seers and wise men, the astrologers and soothsayers is this all, and they shake their heads and say, "we do not know." To the sorrowing relatives and friends who come to them for comfort they can offer only hard stones of ignorance and doubt. Is there no other answer? And we hear the Christian answer rising in the far distance yet drawing nearer and nearer until it fills all time and all life, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The unhesitating and undoubting answer to the tear stained parents, children or friends is "thy child, thy parent, thy friend shall rise again."

Or once more, here is one whose thoughts have changed the face of the world, renewed

institutions, nations and peoples. He has stirred the hearts of men to break through the fetters of superstition, he has led them into truth, he has filled them with hopes, joys, aspirations and courage that enable them to risk all and dare all—even to sacrifice life itself—to maintain spiritual liberties which have dawned upon them. And in time he who thought these thoughts, and spoke these words, and moved these hearts dies, as we say. His thoughts have become the property of man for all time. They are an immortal inheritance. Yet, I ask, is it reasonable that thoughts should last beyond the mind which created them, that words should be greater than their speaker, that the idea should be immortal and the idealist mortal?

Further here are deeds of love and charity based on endowments that shall last through ages. A church, a hospital, a college, an asylum—they are endowed so that they shall strengthen as the ages lengthen, and widen as the generations of men widen, is it reasonable that the deed can be greater than the doer?

They have all gone—the strong man, the great thinker, the masterly genius, the devout almsgiver and philanthropist, are they not in all cases greater than their work whatever it be? Must they not possess an immortality far beyond anything they ever did? Think of this sometimes, brethren, as you ponder the mystery of life and death, and see if it does not afford an answer for some of the enigmas and problems that perplex you. Is not the thinker always greater than the thought; is not the doer always greater than the deed; must not the worker possess a larger immortality than his immortal work; is not the inspirer always greater than his inspiration, must not the idealist be more enduring than his ideal?

The fragmentariness of life meets us on all sides. What activity does not death end? Here is great capacity, and just as it is developing, it is cut short; here is mental development begun, and it is suddenly blighted. Here are affections and love turning the wilderness into a garden, and softening the hard hearts of hate

and anger and they too are quenched. Here are efforts just begun, it needs only time and the master hand to bring them to completion and perfection, but while time continues the master hand is laid low. Dreams, aspirations, purposes, high endeavor, all are shattered. The noblest and the holiest of the sons and daughters of men can scarcely begin to run their race ere darkness settles upon them and their night has arrived. Everything, and every one can get so far and no farther; beginnings innumerable are found everywhere, but endings, completions, perfections, nowhere. Everything is fragmentary. We walk as it were in a silent city. On all sides we see houses, some large, some small, some grand, some mean, some partly finished, some only begun; a foundation laid here, there a wall partly up; again some seem to be almost complete; but wherever we look we see nothing finished, and nowhere is there a workman in sight. We walk through the streets and avenues of this silent unfinished city exhibiting beauty of design and seeming purpose, yet all apparently

deserted. On all sides we see signs of recent work, but nowhere a workman—not a voice, not a sound. And we ask—is this city begun and laid out with consummate skill and design, which already displays beauty and grace, which even now by these unfinished buildings gives intimations and an idea of the complete purpose, is this city apparently deserted never to be completed? Can the mind which planned, and the hands which labored, can they abandon what they have already begun? And we reply no! The master mind, or the master workman may seem absent just now, but we cannot believe that what he has planned on so grand and noble a scale and has already begun he will totally desert. To do so would be to confess failure, defeat, powerlessness. And from what we have seen we cannot acknowledge such defeat and powerlessness. But one day this city will rise to its completion and perfection, and the fully matured design will appear in all its beauty, richness, and usefulness. Even so is it with life here. We walk through it as through a city begun but

not completed, and all its frustrations and sudden ends, its fragmentariness and incompleteness will one day be completed in the eternal city of God.

One great mistake which we nearly all make when we approach this mystery of death is the limited view we take of life. We call life fragmentary, we forget that here is only its beginning. But if we look at the life of Christ we shall be taught our lesson. How fragmentary His life seemed, how little He did, what limitations hedged His short three and thirty years. How incomplete and unfinished we are apt to say. But is this all? Is it not true of Him, and so of us, that His earthly life was typical, and was but the beginning of His atoning life? That His life goes on to completion, and perfection in His risen and ascended life, that at the right hand of God He has brought to full fruition the fragmentary earthly life? It is the future life which is to be the full vindication of God's purpose, wisdom and love to us. This life is but a small part, only a beginning, there beyond shall be the further and larger growth, there the ripen-

ing and beauty of perfection. Let us lift our eyes above the rim of our little horizon of time, and peer—though it be but a short distance—into the dim and ever widening and lengthening, and eternal future. With this thought we shall see that to talk of the fragmentariness of human life is to talk idly, but that life is continuous and goes on forever.

Again let it be said that as “in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive,” is a personal answer to the personal question, “Shall I live?” It is the reply to the vain and cruel theory of a racial immortality, an answer to the dread fear of the loss of personal immortality. Brethren, the resurrection of Christ is the answer to your individual question, “Shall I rise?” The divine reply is, the resurrection is personal, the immortality is personal. We are not to be swallowed up at the last into some eternal spirit, there to lose forever our identity and personality, merged into a quietude of inanition and inaction. But for us all eager, hungry, longing for our own personal life now, and hereafter, the risen life of

Christ says to us, "You and you, each of you shall rise again." We each shall rise unmixed, and unswallowed.

And thus for each of us comes a lesson as well as hope. We are taught to look far beyond the present and the finite. We are taught to think of our lives not as some chips or fragments of life, hewn it may be from some massive block or quarry of life without purpose or end, but as having continuity, purpose, and design. We are taught to value the present as the birthday of eternity, the present as the time for learning our steps, crawling and stumbling it may be, but learning to walk that so when we pass under the veil we shall be ready to enter on that race after perfection, and to understand the glorious design of God which transcends all human conception or thought. "For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." There shall be life whose length, and breadth, and depth, and height passeth all human understanding and knowledge ; there shall

continue the long and eternal career which here we have hoped and panted for with hungry hearts, and straining eyes, and bated breath. Ah! Friends, brethren in Christ, what does not the Resurrection of Him who died and rose again open to us? Words fail before the surpassing vision, thoughts tremble at the glorious prospect, hope even halts ere it dare proceed to the realization of its long dream and expectation.

And so I ask, is not the risen life of Christ an answer to explain the fragmentariness of our earthly life, does it not solve all mysteries, enigmas, and doubts by the sublime hopes, ay, by the positive assurance which it offers us? Do we not rise to the height, the daring, the glory of immortal beings with such a divine and immortal future? Is not the risen life of Christ a help to us to stride over and surmount all difficulties here, to rise above the petty trifles which consume our lives, and evaporate our thoughts? Does it not also give rest to the aches and pains of the heart and soul? Ah! does it not soothe the bereaved heart, does it not take the sting from the bitter-

ness of death itself, to know that as "in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"?

One great motive we should gain on this Easter day, viz., that of immortal hope to cheer us when weary, to spur us for greater flights, and to nerve us to greater courage and endurance; to lift up our hearts in gratitude, and our voices in anthems of joy to the great God, eternal, immortal, invisible, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whose mercy and love are so boundless and constant; to rejoice in the possession of a life endowed with such infinite possibilities and ever widening scope of entering into the divine life, of leaving this earth with its darkness and death, until at last on the great day of the general resurrection—the great eternal Easter day—we may rejoice as we see

" Out of the shadows of night
The world rolls into light
It is daybreak everywhere."

Then shall we enjoy eternal light in the presence of the Eternal God, and eternal life in the light of the Eternal Light.

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